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WITH FATE AGAINST HIM.

By AMANDA M. DOUGLAS,

AUTHOR OF "IN TRUST," "STEPHEN DANE," "CLAUDIA," ETC.

INV. 1898.

"The man is the spirit he worked in; not what he did, but what he became."—CARLYLE.

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TO

MY FRIEND AND COUSIN,

HARVEY WHITFIELD DOUGLAS.

WOODSIDE, 1870.

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ACTION IS TRANSITORY—A STEP, A BLOW,
THE MOTION OF A MUSCLE—THIS WAY OR THAT—
'TIS DONE; AND IN THE AFTER VACANCY
WE WONDER AT OURSELVES LIKE MEN BETRAYED.
SUFFERING IS PERMANENT, OBSCURE, AND DARK,
AND HAS THE NATURE OF INFINITY.

WORDSWORTH.

THE GOOD WANT POWER, BUT TO WEEP BARREN TEARS,
THE POWERFUL GOODNESS WANT, WORSE NEED FOR THEM:
THE WISE WANT LOVE, AND THOSE WHO LOVE WANT WISDOM,
AND ALL BEST THINGS ARE THUS CONFUSED TO ILL.

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND.

TWO SEVERAL LOVERS BUILT TWO SEVERAL CITIES. THE LOVE OF GOD BUILDETH A JERUSALEM; THE LOVE OF THE WORLD BUILDETH A BABYLON. LET EACH ONE INQUIRE OF HIMSELF WHAT HE LOVETH, AND HE SHALL RESOLVE HIMSELF OF WHEREOF HE IS A CITIZEN.

ST. AUGUSTINE.

With Fate Against Him.

CHAPTER I.

Bertrand Duchesne Levasseur brought no plebeian blood into the family when he married Edith Gilliat. His daughter, sitting in state this autumn morning, might have been a queen three hundred years ago, as handsome, I suppose, as the French ancestress who did sit upon a throne. But she was Miss Beatrice Levasseur, dependent upon her grandfather, who lay dying.

She had passed her first girlhood—women of this stamp outgrow it early. Not that she was faded, only it seemed as if there had never been any link between her and childhood. From bibs and bands she must have blossomed into maturity.

She was a beauty, and had been a belle, ruling her lovers with a rod of iron at Newport, Saratoga, Washington, and hosts of smaller places. She was still single at five-and-twenty, because she had resolved to marry a man with whom, as yet, she had held only one desperate flirtation.

Not from love alone. She admired her handsome cousin, Kirke Fordyce Gilliat; and if he had been a poor man, she would have drained his heart to the last drop, smiling with her royal red lips, and let him go for some other woman to comfort. Binding up broken or bruised hearts is a more frequent matter than the world believes; for the loyal soul who discerns the gaping sword-thrust and heals it with divine tenderness, seldom betrays the man who has once trusted her.

She was some three or four months Kirke's senior—almost an "old maid" in his estimation. The slight difference *was* a source of mortification to her. They were about twenty-two when they had this "passage at arms." Kirke had just returned from a three years' sojourn abroad; part of the time spent at a foreign University, the rest in travel. That he was elegant, polished, fascinating, I need hardly tell you. The Gilliats had never been lacking in grace, refinement, or beauty. The old Davenant and Paget blood on one side, the Fordyce and Gilliat on the other, kept the stream pure. A proud, exclusive family, with sufficient wealth to decline any vulgar contact with their less aristocratic neighbors.

Hugh Gilliat lay dying, as I have said. An old man, past the three score years and ten, growing feebler every day.

A picture in himself, as he lay there. The appointments of the room were rich and massive; the grand old mahogany bedstead, with its carved headboard going nearly to the ceiling, and with a remnant of the Davenant arms upon it—for the Davenants having fought by the side of ill-fated Charles, would brook no glance of the canting, vulgar Cromwell, preferring exile instead, and had taken themselves and their treasures across the seas.

Treasures, indeed! This soft carpet, that seemed like the cool and springy depths of woodland moss; the wine-red tint of the mahogany, inlaid with pearl and silver; the silken curtains, with their heavy golden fringe; the luxurious chairs, in rich crimson velvet. The marbles were pure and choice, the pictures fine, two or three of the old masters among them, and even the lesser adornments betraying no lack of money in the purchaser, united with the highest cultivation and taste.

Beatrice revelled in all this. She was not a born nurse, as are some women; indeed, she rather shrank from the usual concomitants of a sick-room, but the elegance of this always had a charm for her. The broad garden and lawn spread out

before the windows another vista of beauty, from the clumps of magnificent evergreens and gorgeous autumnal flowers to the small silvery lake, where a Triton in the centre blew flashing streams of spray from his horn.

She sat with her hands folded in her lap. You seldom saw her busy with any trifle, unless it might be a book; and she oftener summoned her maid to read that. An imperious, haughty woman, quite able to sustain the family honors without being crushed thereby.

The sick man turned uneasily upon his bed of down. Very pale, very much worn and emaciated, the white, soft skin bedded in a thousand wrinkles, the thin nostrils transparent, the dark eyes sunken, and the straggling hair like threads of silver. Yet Hugh Gilliat was not unhandsome, in spite of old age and years of illness.

"Has the mail come this morning, Beatrice?" he asked feebly.

The old, anxious question, and the eyes turned wistfully upon her.

"An hour ago." And she glanced furtively at him, not in any regret for his pain, but to see how he bore the delay.

A faint, wandering sigh: a little lifting of the eyebrows: a little compression of the colorless lips; then the thin fingers plucked feebly at the silken coverlet.

"A bad sign, Aunt Laura would say," she thought to herself.

"Perhaps I had better write again," she suggested.

Among her other charms, Miss Levasseur had a very peculiar voice: smooth, rich, but strangely deliberate; as if she weighed her words before uttering them.

There was no answer for many moments. The fluttering lids dropped feebly, and so still was he that you might have fancied him dead.

Presently he roused a little and started at the fringe of the spread.

"Beatrice!"

"Well—can I do anything?"

She rose and came nearer. A rounded, symmetrical figure, full of affluent grace, with sloping shoulders, snowy throat, proud poise of the head, and a perfect wealth of shining black hair, that lay above her brow in great ripples. I told you she was handsome—perhaps no face is so perfect but that some over-critical eyes can detect flaws in it. This one was narrow at the temples, and a trifle depressed; and the eyes had a remarkable inward look, as if she were brooding over something that the world was not free to solve. This expression *could* become very unpleasant when she chose: it was one of her most forcible weapons. The nose was straight, slender, and with that thoroughbred air you find in human beings as well as animals. There was another little touch of something that marred the face. Just between the outer line of the nostril and the corner of the mouth, there were a few forcible lines that might lure a wandering soul to destruction, and smile complacently as he drifted by with outstretched, despairing hands. For all it could be the centre of so much tenderness, it reminded you of flame playing over ice, and was at once beguiling, yet the most cruel trait in the whole face. But then the contour and coloring were exquisite.

"Sit here beside me, Beatrice. I want to talk. I grow weaker every day."

His breath came in feeble, yet rapid respirations, and his eyes studied her face in an entreating manner. If he might but look into her soul!

Better that you did not, Hugh Gilliat. For though the great idea of her life, so young and strong, and yours just fluttering in the balance, are nearer alike than you fear, perhaps you would shrink a little from placing Kirke Gilliat's soul in her white, untender hands.

"What did Doctor Parmlee say this morning?"

"Nothing at all, I think. The wine and the tonic were to be continued."

"Little good they will do: little good. If Kirke would but come!"

She drew one corner of her mouth as if with a sudden twinge of pain, and said, slowly—

"He must have missed the letters."

"I do not see how he could. I wish the boy loved to be here. Beatrice—I thought to make him master of the place when I was done with it."

"Yes;" she answered, calmly.

"But he neglects me. It is three months since he has been at home."

"Young men are apt to find attractions elsewhere."

He glanced at her sharply with his sunken eyes, in which the death-shadow quivered.

"You do not think that—" And the voice was lost in a mute, piteous appeal.

It was her turn, now. You would not believe that she was the kind of woman to wait patiently for weeks until the moment came in which she might serve her cause.

"I suppose there is some girl at the bottom of the delay. It is nearly always the case."

Her voice was light to carelessness, and a half smile crossed her lips.

"No, you do not think it—Kirke—I've had a plan a long, long while; and I would like him to promise me—but Kirke would never lower himself by any mes-alliance."

Beatrice shrugged her shoulders with the grace of a Frenchwoman, and allowed her lips the least perceptible curl. He saw it, as she meant he should.

"No, he could not soil the clear, pure blood that has come direct from royalty! Pagets and Davenants, Fordyce and Gilliats—not a stain or blemish. It would be only a young man's way of amusing himself."

"Oh, I am not sure that it is so—" carelessly. She knew that he loved Kirke Gilliat's little finger more than her whole

body. He was always so ready to resent the slightest interference.

"But why does he not come?"

She answered him with her eyes. The words that she longed to utter were thrust back out of sight.

For like some other proud old families the Gilliats had never rated their women very highly. They had been proud of their beauty, dignity, and the inherent grace none of them were without. When the daughters had married well, their duty ended.

It fretted Beatrice. She was hungry for power. An alien element had been transferred into her blood from some of the long-ago grandmothers who had ruled kings.

"I wish you would send for Moreau," he said feebly, fretfully.

She rang the bell and gave the order. Then she returned and bathed his face, smoothed the pillow, chafed the cold and trembling hands in her own, so warm and fresh that the touch appeared to inspire him with new life.

"I meant that he should marry you," he burst out presently, with an energy quite foreign to his usual highbred languor and reticence. "You two are all that is left of the pure old stock. I should like to die in the belief that your children would run about these halls, so dear to me, that *he* would be master and you mistress of this broad domain."

She would have been well satisfied with the position of mistress whether she were Kirke Gilliat's wife or not. She had held herself all these years for one of the two contingencies.

"I think he does not love me," she made answer in her slow, decisive way.

"And that he *does* love another?"

"How can I tell," almost gloomily. "I am not in his confidence."

"But you will marry him?"

"If he desires it."

The old man moved uneasily. After all there was a little tender romance in his heart concerning Kirke. He wanted the boy to be happy. He could dower his grand-daughter, and still have sufficient for him.

For he had always been rather distrustful of Beatrice. Why, he could not explain to himself. He would not have had her less handsome or less proud, but he experienced a dim misgiving concerning her heart, a good thing for a woman to have if kept under proper control. But if, on the other hand, Kirke should bring home a wife whose lineage was common, whose aims and hopes, whose very love should have in it some of the grosser elements—whose children would riot in this old mansion.

The vague pang in his brain sent a shiver through every pulse. He raised himself partially, leaning on his elbow. The colorless lips gasped and quivered piteously, and he made two or three attempts before he spoke.

"Beatrice, you *will* love him?"

It was more of entreaty than question or command.

She studied him with a quick, stealthy glance. For a year, perhaps, she had been waiting for some auspicious moment. Had it come?

There was one peculiar thing in Beatrice Levasseur's eyes. Not the first gleam of coquetry, though she had brought many a man to her feet, but a kind of deep, tenacious resolve, not the patience of any tender grace, but an underlying resolve that often does its work more effectually—the power of waiting. The pupil and the iris were so nearly of the same color, a kind of steely black, that it gave them this strange, inscrutable expression.

It passed like a flash. Her brain processes were slow, but once arrived at any conclusion, she acted instantly.

"Love him!" she said, drawing in a fluttering breath that sounded almost like a sob. "Ah, you ask that of me, and

you have never dreamed why other men ceased to hold interest for me,—why, I preferred to remain here as your companion rather than mingle with the gay world. I think he cared for me once, and if whoever came between——"

She knew her sentence was just long enough, and paused at the opportune moment.

"He *did* care, I am certain!" The old man was roused to a tremor of excitement. "And it is best that you two should marry—the last of an old, pure line. I will send Moreau for him at once."

Beatrice looked satisfied, something more, perhaps, elated. Yet, bending over him, she murmured, "You will not tell him——?"

"I will give him my commands. If he chooses to disobey, the consequences will rest upon him alone. There shall be no more delay—no more neglect!"

The spirit of Hugh Gilliat spoke in that, rallying its old forces for a moment, and then he fell back upon the pillow. Beatrice bathed the deathlike face and chafed the cold hands anew, wondering in her soul how long he could last—long enough to carry out his latest project?

A servant tapped at the door.

"Mr. Moreau has come."

"Mr. Moreau," Beatrice repeated, in answer to her grandfather's questioning glance.

"Show him in."

"Shall I leave you?"

"No, child. Beatrice, the journey is almost done."

He uttered the words sadly. Day by day he had been striving to thrust aside the fatal knowledge, but it rushed over him now like a torrent threatening to sweep him utterly away. How strange death was! He must provide for the new line of Gilliats, and first of all be sure to have them worthy of their name and patrimony.

The new-comer was a small, wiry, keen-eyed man with a

certain subdued business air. His salutation had in it a peculiar grateful deference,

"I want you to go for my grandson immediately. If you do not find him in Philadelphia—you have his address—continue the search and bring him back with you. Tell him that I am—dying!"

It was the first time that Hugh Gilliat had confessed it. And now an awful grayness stole over his face, as if the admission brought the dread visitant nearer.

"That is—all?"

The sick man considered a few moments.

"No, that is not all. You may leave us, Beatrice."

She rose and swept slowly from the room, leaving an indescribable something in her wake. An ease and dignity, a certain sumptuous air that was like a trail of light through the soft autumn hush of the room.

She guessed what they were doing for the next half hour, but she asked no questions then, or ever. She knew Hugh Gilliat too well to ruin her cause by the slightest show of impatience.

She was summoned presently by Aunt Laura, one of the distant Gilliat cousins, an aunt by courtesy only. A tall, pale woman with silvery hair and thin, wrinkled face, but bearing a few strong family characteristics. For many years she had held the position of housekeeper and female head of the family.

"He has asked for you, my dear;" she announced in her soft, solemn voice. "There's a great change in him, a great change."

Beatrice went back to her post. Aunt Laura wandered in and out like the noiseless current of a shady river, hinting nervously at the impending change, and sighing to herself. Beatrice grew strangely tender, yet it was no part of her nature, rather a stray branch grafted on by circumstances. Not a moment but she watched through her inscrutable eyes, as if

counting out the heart-beats, and keeping one end steadfastly in view.

Glorious autumn weather it was, with golden days full of the balm and odor of yonder crimsoning woodlands, with skies of rose and purple and nights of fragrant dusk. Nearer to the other shore drifted the soul of the man within, but her white hand would be no bond to hold him back. She had no romantic regard for old age, no desperate clinging to the souls near her. When *her* time came she expected to die calmly, and that others should, did not in the least surprise her.

So she dreamed over her own plans. If any hope should be crushed out of Kirke Gilliat's life—any foolish fancy, some day when he came to his senses and weighed Rothermel against it, he would be thankful that circumstances had decided for him. According to her creed there was no ill and no wound that could not be cured by gold.

But of that deep and noiseless pain which wrenches souls, of the stab in the secret recesses of one's being that cuts off hope and happiness at one keen sword thrust, and yet raises no cry to the world, she recked little. Her imagination was not of the vivid order, neither was the torturing habit of introspection one of her specialties. A straightforward, commonplace woman indeed, with small principle, but a giant of ambition and a demon of ease and luxury ; and to provide for these, her petted offspring of habit, she knew no scruple, but that of carefulness. Not a Borgia or a Semiramis, because, forsooth, such women have gone out of date !

She had hazarded her guess concerning Kirke Gilliat as one would throw a dice. There were few young men but what at some period of their salad days become entangled with a girl they would hardly care to marry. And granting this imaginary being were an angel of light, with poverty for her dower, she would be objectionable to Hugh Gilliat, even in his death throe.

But one morning, Doctor Parmlee said, with a grave shake of the head,

"He cannot live beyond another midnight. When will Mr. Kirke return?"

"If—" and Beatrice Levasseur gave a great gasp. But there would be the will!

Even before the Doctor's low tone had ceased to flutter like a breath of summer air through the dark hall, there was a clatter of horses' hoofs on the pavement without, and a deep voice that made the blood tingle in every pulse. The door was flung wide open and in the sunshine stood Kirke Gilliat, dusty and travel-stained, his face pale and anxious.

"Just in time, my dear young friend!" cried the worthy Doctor.

Kirke bowed to his cousin, flew up the stairs and made himself presentable, washing away the weariness and soil, and then walked straight to his grandfather's room.

What passed between the two, Kirke never cared to repeat. Aunt Laura went in and out in her usual noiseless fashion. Beatrice was gently helpful. Doctor Parmlee came in again at three, and they all watched in silence. At twilight the soul of Hugh Gilliat passed over the river.

There was a great funeral at Rothermel. Something of the old feudal system had been kept up on the estate, and after the family, and the gentry round, came the cottagers. Their master had been kind, if cold and hedged about with minute formalities. Yet Aunt Laura dropped the only tears upon his grave, and the last thing she ever did was to plant some roses at his feet.

The immediate family assembled in the library to hear the will read. The table was draped in black; the chair in which the old man used to sit, and the crimson curtains, were also shrouded. Two women in their deep mourning robes, and Kirke Gilliat, high-bred, handsome, but deadly pale.

Small legacies and gifts first, Aunt Laura's house and pen-

sion second, a regular income to be paid to Beatrice Levasseur, and the estate with all its rents and appurtenances to go to Kirke Gilliat if he married his cousin, if not, her income was to be doubled, a portion of ten thousand dollars to be paid to him, while the remainder went to a distant Gilliat connection.

The will contained no news for Kirke. His grandfather had told him all, and in his dying moments extorted a promise that he would marry Beatrice. He had given it to soothe the last bitter pang of separation.

The keen-eyed lawyer glanced furtively at Kirke.

Not a muscle betrayed his resolve or displeasure. He bowed low to the assembled company and retired. Straight to his room up-stairs he went, and flinging wide open the shutters, sat down to consider his fate.

A tall, finely-formed man, with a maturity of figure not always seen at five-and-twenty. There was a touch of the Fordyce in his clear ruddy skin and bright chestnut hair, while his full beard had in it the bronze brown tint the old painters loved. A peculiar kind of beauty indicating a pleasure-loving nature, a soul that absorbed rapidly whatever ministered to its desires, and passed coldly by whatever was distasteful, revelling in a passionate and glorious enjoyment for the time, gathering sweets like the bee from every flower that came in his way.

Three years ago he had expected to marry his cousin. He had a presentiment that this was his grandfather's desire. So he sunned himself in the fascination of the stately Beatrice, more generous to him than to most of her lovers, because her eyes were fixed steadily upon the golden background.

One of those sudden and unaccountable changes intervened, as if he had thrown in his plummet for sounding and struck against a solid rock. So he had never asked her to marry him, and wandered elsewhere, butterfly like, in the search for pleasures.

What else? What sweet, dread knowledge had come to him? The power to lift his soul out of the self-loving groove

into which it had drifted through flattering from without and indulgence from within, by contact with the one woman loyal, tender, truthful, who roused all that was noblest in his manhood.

The old story and the old temptation. Whether he should barter his soul and his happiness for these broad acres?

Ah, they *were* broad and smiling in bronze and crimson tints, and the deep green of cedar, pine, and hemlock, the murmur of the old river beyond, the background of mountain lying in purple gloom, and this mansion where generations of Gilliats had been born and ruled, small princes in their way. Then Kirke Gilliat looked at the paltry ten thousand and the woman to whom he owed fealty.

Beatrice Levasseur listening heard the soft step that paced the floor all night long. She knew then that his heart was at stake, and ground her white teeth with bitter envy. She *did* love him—Kirke Gilliat, master of Rothermel, not the poor man with his ten thousand dollars; and she hated this other one who had come between.

Grave, silent, and pale was he for several days. He took long solitary walks and longer solitary rides, his poor beast coming home sometimes with strained eyes and his glossy coat covered with foam. Aunt Laura was weak and motherly, Beatrice quiet, reserved, distant. In truth the very reserve began to pique him, at length. He had this much of the boy still about him, that if you put up a barrier he desired to demolish it, or at least test his strength in the endeavor. Never had Beatrice looked handsomer than in her deep mourning dress, just relieved at throat and wrists with folds of wreath-like illusion. Never had her voice been sweeter, or her eyes worn softer lights.

To a man fond of refinement, elegance, and that nameless grace above, yet often confused with high breeding, the constant picture of such a woman may become a dangerous fascination. He ceased to fret against the will, resolving on making

a pretence that he would go away, would be true to the promise so sacredly given to another. And because he felt that he could leave Rothermel, he lingered, toying with the temptation. All this while not a word had been said on either side.

Then he began to ask himself how much right he had to crowd Beatrice out of this birthright for a stranger's sake. He also tasted the sweets of possession, the delicate allurement of authority. To be master here—to rear his children in this grand old mansion, with its family heirlooms, its plate of gold and silver, to have the ease and comfort of this wealth—ah! that made the poverty look bleak and bitter by contrast.

He had promised from an overwhelming impulse of tenderness: for the sake of having his grandfather die in peace. He hated to give pain when he was present to witness the suffering. And although he knew then he could not keep his word, he smoothed the matter over to his conscience, putting off the evil day.

And now the tempter said—why not put it off altogether? Turn which ever way he might, there would be some sin, some broken promise. Which would bring the greater loss and discomfort!

Day by day he weighed them in the balance. It is always the present woman who has the greater advantage, and Beatrice understood hers and used it warily, surrounding it with a kind of high emprise. She would snatch him from the dangerous influences that had crept into his path: she would really restore him to position, wealth, and honor!

These two skilfully concealed the truth from each other, and the deeper blackness of their own treachery and selfishness. Had the pure Gilliat blood come to the dregs?

Kirke remained three weeks, then went away without a word as to his intentions. In a fortnight he returned, and Beatrice knew then that she had won her cause. True, he was nervous and ill at ease, and came to have a kind of haggard look.

The servants, and good Doctor Parmlee, as well as Aunt Laura, ascribed it to grief; but there were two not so easily blinded.

"He was a fool to allow himself to become entangled," muttered Moreau, watching him stealthily.

"He has ceased to love *her*," commented Beatrice, inwardly.

Kirke Gilliat was to marry his cousin in six months—before three had passed they were engaged. The wedding would necessarily be quiet.

Glancing down the future, he strove to soothe his conscience. "For the sake of possible children," he said.

Ah, he had yet to learn that a man might wake from his ambitious dreams, to find himself cursed by a woeful progeny, the punishment stretching from this near life to that afar, leaving in its track ruin and desolation.

CHAPTER II.

It seemed to Victor Hurst that the long summer day would never come to an end. Since seven o'clock this morning he had stood in his place amid heat, and smoke, and cinders, the only music this incessant crunch and whirr of machinery, the ponderous ring of the hammer, the click of fifty sharp instruments that cut as clean as a guillotine, a hundred or two more that punched and riveted and joined—a general chorus of hideous sounds.

There had been an hour's intermission at noon, to be sure. He sat on the dusty window-ledge, in the coolest part of the shop, and ate his lunch. His mother had wrapped it in a snowy napkin, which his first touch defiled. Every day she did the same thing. He smiled bitterly, seeing it. Clouds of smoke and grime blew in the cobwebbed window, settling on the flaky biscuit and rich golden butter; the thin sliced ham, the green currant pie in a white saucer, the cheese, rich and soft—a feast to a man with a wholesome appetite. But the first mouthful choked him.

"Hillo, Hurst! star-gazing, as usual! Look in the bottom of a well, at midday, man. Come and have some beer!"

A rough but friendly invitation. Three men lounged over opposite, their lunch spread on an anvil, with a newspaper for table-cloth. A great stone pitcher filled with ale graced the centre, from which the group filled their tin cups liberally.

"He's temp'rance, he is," said another: a small, wiry fellow, with eyes hidden far behind shaggy brows, after the manner of a ferret's. "Should a' said grace for us, Parson. Here's a health!"

The pint cup was emptied at a breath, and placed on the improvised table with a force that made it ring.

"Come, Hurst, be neighborly."

Ned Connor was always social over his ale. A man of five-and-forty, rough, unkempt, unshorn. A great, brawny fellow —better for a man's friend than his enemy, and not to be desired for either.

"Thank you, no."

There was a clean sound in the youth's voice, albeit a little husky.

"Let him alone! What does he want o' yale! Parson's souls must be temp'rit, and set a good 'xample. Isn't the day but Monday, and the young un's head full o' yesterday's sermon?"

They all laughed.

"When 'ill 'ee take to a gown and pulpit?" said the third.

"There's no gowns here, save over to the church of the gentry. Chapel and school 'us folks don't need 'em."

"Mayhap his daddy was a shoemaker."

"Hold your tongue, Garrick," interrupted Connor. "His daddy's a good man, if I do say it! An' let him alone. If he won't drink, he won't. He's as well off, if he thinks so."

"Wise child that knows his father, Iv'e hearn tell. Don't favor th' parson much wi' his red hair."

Connor raised his brawny fist, but while it was still in mid-air, a cry arrested it:

"Not for me, Connor, not for me!" and the voice rang out sharp and clear. "No quarrel among comrades for my sake."

Like a flash he stood beside them. Connor's face was flushed, Garrick's sullen and glowering.

"I don't drink, you know—not altogether because my father preaches against it, but I've no taste for anything of the kind. It's not worth words or blows among friends."

"True enough." The vice-like fist fell and unclosed, then grasped the mug of ale again. "Health," he said, almost brusquely.

Hurst went back to his window, crushed the scarcely tasted lunch to a jelly, and was about to thrust it back into the basket.

"It will only fret her," he murmured to himself. "And —some one may be hungering."

He vaulted over the broken, grimy ledge just as the three, all good-natured again, burst into a noisy chorus. Glancing down the hot, unsheltered street sent a shiver over him. It was so pitiless! Shops and factories with the listless, midday air, sidewalks strewn with debris, and here and there a muddy stream oozing slowly through its bed of cobble-stones, but baking to a crust before it reached the main gutter.

Victor Hurst shrank from it all with an intense disgust. He picked his way over bars of iron and the remnant of a broken engine, through a dingy alleyway too narrow for the sun to penetrate, and out to the next street, which looked rather more inviting. A group of ragged urchins were pitching pennies in the shade, and a beggar-girl with her basket sat on the step of a rickety stoop.

"Here," he said, thrusting the parcel into her thin, dirty hand, napkin and all.

She nodded her head, but did not move her eyes from the group of boys.

Then he went onward rapidly, in spite of the hot noon. Some demon within seemed urging with fiercer heat than this broiling sun showered down. And yet whither? What point of coolness and rest spread out before him?

He saw it now. It was worth all the walk. Far beyond the river that men had prisoned in sluggish bonds for selfish purposes, coining its clean, clear throbs into their vile gold, far beyond the smoke and red haze, the squalid houses, the unclean sights and sounds, rose the distant mountains.

It was odd, but one verse of an old hymn, heard a month ago in prayer-meeting, kept floating through his brain with a strange persistence:

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green,
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan rolled between."

More than once he had come out here to view the spot. To be sure, this muddy Jordan had to be glorified by the eye of faith, but beyond, beyond! How one long ridge swelled up browner and browner, until it took a tint of purple blackness; rounding crag and headland, opening interminable vistas, haunts where one might lie and dream forever with the clouds of green waving above his head. It was so cool, so restful, in the tender silence. The dense mass of pine and waving hemlock, relieved here and there by birch and maple, or a stray poplar, with its quivering silver. Ah, how sweet, how lovely! To go there and live even a hermit's life would be keenest enjoyment! Anything to take one beyond this noise into a heaven of peace.

The midday hush began to be broken. Crowds of men and boys jostled each other with a rude jest or merry quip; frowsy-headed women, with their sleeves rolled above their elbows, came to street-doors and laughed shrilly in response to some neighborly greeting. But he never stirred until the sharp steam-whistles pierced the air with their hideous shrieks.

It needed but a few moments to stride back. The men were all in their places, the engines had begun, the hammers were crashing, and the click, click of the smaller works was like the undertone of some diabolical harmony. It rasped every nerve.

Now and then some one sang a stave of popular melody, coarse, perhaps, but cheerful. They all enjoyed this commonplace life, with its hurry, and bustle, and smoke, and grime. Some of the men took great pride in it, fashioned iron and steel into shapes and bodies that held a power akin to life,—action at least. Why should he dislike it so?

Would the day ever come to an end? He glanced out of

his window. Nothing but the dingy orange-red sunshine, and the hazy, bleared sky. Was there a God up above? Did He care for all these millions of souls debased and degraded, with not one clean, wholesome idea, who toiled from childhood to old age, or until they dropped into an unhonored grave? What good came of it,—what great truths were evolved in the course of their existence? Would not the brave old planet have been as well without them?

Latterly he had taken to nursing his heterodox fancies over the fire. He smiled grimly now and then when he thought of the dross being purged out of a human soul in the same fashion. He had been taught it from childhood. The lake burning forever and ever—like this. But to-day he did not smile. Neither did he believe.

Six o'clock came at last. Several of the men went to wash in a huge trough beside the boiler, and shaking the cinders out of their hair, combed it with their fingers, threw off their leathern aprons, and hurried away. Hurst waited until the last. He let the water out and turned in some fresh.

"Mighty perticerler you are!" said the foreman, with a kind of good-humored sneer. "In my young days, what was good enough for their betters was good enough for boys."

"You don't grudge me a little cold water?" Victor said, almost angrily.

"Not the water, no, not—the—water;" in a deliberate way. "But while I'm here, Hurst, I *will* give you a bit of advice. Men never like 'prentice boys to be taking on airs. You'll want a place when you're out of your time, and there's nothing like making friends—for a young man. Feeling's pretty strong, sometimes. And when a fellow gets the ill-will of his mates—"

"I shall never ask anything of them!" in a haughty tone.

Now that he had washed his face clean—it had not been free from grime since morning—you could see, as he held it bravely up to Baxter, that it was an unusual face, to say the least. The forehead was clear and white as a girl's, and the hair clustering

about it was of a peculiar color, a very deep auburn, with the bronze rather than red tint, fine, soft,—a great mane curling in loose rings at the ends. His eyes were large and gray, his nose straight, with those wonderfully flexible nostrils that contracted and distended with a breath. A rather wide mouth, with a line of bronze moustache on the lip, and the lower part of the face not filled out, too thin for beauty of contour, since at the temples it was very broad. Now there was more defiance in it than any other expression.

"You're standing in your own light, Hurst, I can tell you that!"

"No, I'll never ask aught of them, or of any master. I hate the whole thing! Every shop may sink to ——" perdition he was about to say, but the thought of his father's calling restrained him, and so he added—"for all I care."

"You'll be wanting daily bread as well as the rest of us," with a half smile of contempt at the boy's foolish energy.

"I'll get it some other way."

"If it is black work it makes white money. And no one can say that Norcross is a hard master."

"I've no fault to find with him. The work is good enough for those who like it. I don't."

With that he turned away, combing out his long light hair until it glittered like a sunset sea.

Baxter thought him an odd compound of vanity and Miss Nancyism, his figure of speech for anything foolishly nice.

Then he came back a step.

"Hurst," he said kindly, "you've some odd idees stored in your brain. May be it comes of being a parson's son; but your father hasn't a bit of such pride. He's a good man—is John Hurst. I shall never forget the night he stood over my Jem, never. And that he's up in heaven I haven't a doubt—along of your father's good words. I'm not a religious man, but I know the genooine article when I see it. I should be sorry to have *his* son go to the bad—as parson's sons often do."

Victor Hurst uttered not one word in reply. His face changed from scarlet to white, and a blue line settled about his lips. Not altogether anger, either. There was somewhere in the words a deep thrust that he could not analyze, and it hurt him.

But Baxter, having given his advice, walked away. Victor finished his rude toilet, gave his trousers a brush, put on his coat, and went out also, taking up his little basket as he passed a shelf.

The walk was long enough to allow his temper to cool. He was hot and hasty, but always it seemed there lay in the depths of his heart a soreness that some words rasped into an open wound. Why was he so sensitive, so keenly susceptible to every look or tone?

The streets of Weareham were not marvels of beauty. No purely manufacturing town ever can be. The river would have given the finest locations; for on the opposite side the bank was very irregular—here sloping down into what might have been verdurous lawns, there rising into small bluffs which a house would have rendered picturesque in the extreme. But instead there were shops, with their tall chimneys; sheds for coal, lime, and timber of all kinds; sloops and schooners flapping their sails listlessly in the late afternoon breeze, and two brisk-looking steamboats, with a black tug sandwiched between. A busy, thriving place,—a town in which fortunes were made, where the few prospered and the many lived and died unknown—perhaps not the less happy. God, keeping watch over it all, decides.

It was a long walk out to the little cottage. John Hurst had gone thither for cheapness, and to be nearer his work. Not but what he could have found enough in the town; but people in this busy place had to swarm everywhere, and a true minister of God is never at a loss. The men who sent him knew that he was doing a good work, and further than that they gave themselves little trouble.

But Victor used to wish the cottage elsewhere. The longest way round was pleasanter; but to-night, with his eyes fixed on the eternal hills, he cared little for the minor wayside beauties. The branching elms drooping in the summer heat, the glossy green maples, the dense horse-chestnuts, scarcely won a glance. Now and then he half stumbled over some group of playing children; but not being in a patient mood, he scarcely noted the exclamations.

Through the dusty streets, still smoky and hazy, looking dimmer in the orange-red glow of the sunset, the dingy houses brightened a bit here and there by some stray gleam.

Presently they grew more irregular, with larger gardens and a few attempts at flowers. He knew of one window where he would see a pot of carnations in bloom. A hump-backed woman with large sad eyes sat here and sewed. He saw her early in the morning and late at night. Was life wearisome to her? Did she never wish to be out of it all? He thought he should, if by any mischance he lost youth and health.

There she was! A sweet, placid face, with her silvery hair gathered beneath a Quaker cap. Was there something in this religion that kept people always at peace?

On a little farther. Here the ground was quite open, with a background of straggling trees, great pines, and chestnuts with bare, scraggy trunks and thick masses of foliage above, that shut out the view of the mountains beyond. He held a grudge against them for that. One had been scathed by lightning. A jagged fissure going nearly into the heart, twisting the bark away, charring and blackening,—and it was now a mass of dead branches, save one green twig high atop.

The cottage had once been a soft light-brown in color, but it was sadly faded by time and lack of care. The little garden in front was a mass of bloom, and over the porch was trained honeysuckle and clematis—Virgin's bower. Both displayed some scattering flowers, sprays of snowy white, like stars among the green, and the yellow and scarlet of the other. The win-

dow-curtains were like drifts of snow, and on each wide ledge stood a saucer containing a mound of flowers.

The woman within heard the stride, and with her work still in hand went down the path to meet her son. She knew by the step that something had fretted and discomposed him. The cloudy face and firmly-set lips were a tacit confession the moment he glanced into her eyes. He almost wished that she could not fathom his moods quite so readily.

"Are you tired, Victor?"

A sweet, clear, trusty voice. You put faith in the woman the instant you heard it.

"Tired—no," with a short, forced laugh. "What should make a great fellow like me tired?"

This time he cast his eyes down to the stone flagging, scoured to the farthest verge of cleanliness.

"It has been a very warm day."

"Yes," briefly.

He passed through the hall and up stairs. The mere face and hand washing at the shop never sufficed for him. He had partitioned off a small corner of his room, near the chimney, and fitted it up with some cheap bathing conveniences. So when he had refreshed himself, scoured off the grime and dirt, and was arrayed in clean linen, he began to feel more comfortable. Perhaps too it washed away the ill-humor.

He possessed a girlish, nervous love for cleanliness. The water rippling cool over his fine, soft skin; the white, fragrant clothes, always laid in dried rose-leaves and sweet baisley, filled his whole soul with delight. The damp curls clustered loosely above his forehead like a restful crown.

Then he went down the broad stairs, uncarpeted, but like everything else scrupulously clean. The table was spread in the middle of the floor. What if the cloth was coarse and the ware plain delf—it was neatly arranged, and just before his plate a slender vase containing some flowers. She did not always do this.

"Where is father?" glancing out of the window.

"He was called to a man in Kent's Lane—said to be dying. It is not likely that he will be home to supper."

Still, she had placed a plate for him. If he had gone away for a week she would have paid him the same respect.

The young man drew his brows to a little frown. The peacefulness that made him look like a young god only a moment ago was gone.

"If the earth could open and swallow Kent's Lane it would be so much misery and crime and pollution taken out of the world! Oh, mother, *does* he believe their souls are worth saving—that they have any?"

"Victor!"

She glanced up in amazement. A tall, slender woman, looking young for her forty years. Her son might have, nay, did inherit a certain delicacy and refinement from her—it hung about her as fragrance hangs about the rose. But her hair was very dark, with purplish tints, and her eyes nearly black; her mouth small, her nose not nearly so fine as her son's, and the contour of the face altogether different, with something wider than the space of the twenty years that lay between them.

"Yes;" nothing daunted by the look and tone. "It seems too that there is something sweet and pure in a human soul that *will* struggle up to the light. The forlornest plant in a dark cellar crawls toward some crevice, you know, even if it has to drag a yard of thread-like stem, that can hardly sustain the weight of a bud."

"But these creatures—faugh!"

The haughty nostrils curled in disgust.

"God made them. They are His creatures. And if they cannot save themselves, some one must help. Was not Cain his brother's keeper?"

"*Did* God make them?"

"Victor!" in a sad, pained tone this time.

"Mother, I wish you had called me John after my father. I wonder that he indulged you in such a romantic fancy."

The young man gave a grim, bitter smile.

"It was *my* fancy. Then you do not like it?"

There was something deeper than disappointment in the faltering voice.

"Yes, I like it;" with a peculiar exultant ring. "Victor"—softly, as if he were petting a child. "The name for a man who is to triumph."

"Yes—I thought of it then. There comes some kind of trial in all our lives;" and there was a strand of reverie in her tone while her thoughts seemed engrossed with an inward sight. "And you will gain the victory—make a good fight," she added, as an afterthought.

"With what, mother?"

"Your own soul, I think;" rather hesitatingly.

"And what am I to do with it, mother? Bring it up to the earthly height for which it longs so madly, like a chained prisoner for freedom; or cross it and thwart it, wrap it in the coarseness of sackcloth or the foulness of ashes, and when it has been despoiled of every human attribute, of every desire and hope, call it a thing fit for Heaven, and offer it to God? Why, it appears monstrous."

"Victor, you are tempted of the evil one to-night."

He was toying with his plate of blackberries, turning them over in the hoar-frost of sugar that lay in little mounds atop.

"Which is the devil, and which is God?"

His voice was hoarse with some but half-suppressed emotion, and dangerous steely lights flashed into his eyes. She saw it all with pain and anguish, deeper than he could ever guess.

"Yes. Decide for me if you can;" and his words rang out sharply. "For the clear and pure impulses that lift me above the grovelling lives that I see daily about me—the instinct which would keep me from theft, drunkenness, vileness, lying, forgery, and perhaps murder, makes me hate my surrounding

so bitterly that the whole world grows black before me! I loathe every day, every hour, save perhaps an evening like this."

She knew what made this better than ordinary, why she had placed the flowers before his plate and sprinkled the white sugar over his berries. There was a fine and subtle antagonism growing up between the father and the son. She, standing midway, with love on one side, and duty on the other, such as few women ever could owe, had tried to be blind to the fatal differences. Ah, God, what if her whole life had proved a mistake!

"Yes, which is the Devil?" All day there has been a hot, smothering fire in my very soul. Why, at noon I could have throttled Garrick, low brute! for something he said, only this same impulse withheld me—because his coarse skin and matted beard would have struck hard and foul against my sensitive fingers—not that his life had any sacredness in my eyes."

"Does God's grace implant such desires?"

Her voice had a sudden bravery in it, her face lighted up with a peculiar martyr-like strength. The issue that she had staved off so long, and temporized with in her woman's tender way, must be met.

"*Has* God anything to do with it? It appears sometimes as if we were creatures of blind chance. Place a man in the right groove, and he goes up, thrust him outside of the pale, and it is only a longer or shorter road to perdition—according to my father's belief;" and he smiled bitterly.

"Oh, Victor—I thought you in the right way once—" and there was a great fear and trembling in her voice.

"I thought so too. We did have a few months of perfect peace then, a little glimpse of what heaven might be. I tried to be patient with my work. I comforted myself with brave old St. Paul's courage and strength and heroism. But perhaps he had a natural aptitude for tent-making, and I—yes, I hate the sight and sound and grime and smoke of that place down yonder! You don't know. Snatches of coarse, ribald songs,

jeering, swearing! What does it do toward purifying a man's soul? Not that Norcross is to blame. He wants the best workmen he can find; and if they are brawny and sure of eye and hand, what matters a few gallons of beer inside, or a few oaths without, so long as his work is all right and he makes money? It is no worse there than anywhere else. My father thought it would crush the pride and take the whims out of me. It has taken the religion, if I had any!"

His tone was deep and desperate.

"And what has come in its place? Has your soul any better anchor?"

"Nothing but this great hungry discontent gnawing on my vitals like a vulture. And to-day it seems as if all the ache and agony had culminated. I've found the best way out. I've resolved upon my course."

"And that is——?" her face growing gray and wan with apprehension.

"I am going away. I am glad to have this talk with you to-night, for to-morrow I shall leave Weareham and go out to a new world."

"Oh, my son! my son!"

A wild, pained cry, like that of the mother-bird who finds her nest despoiled and her birdlings gone!

CHAPTER III.

THE passionate love, the strong and impetuous anxieties of a mother, the grief of separation rending her soul asunder, the settled conviction that much was wrong, but the utter incapacity to right it, all spoke in her cry.

Victor Hurst sprang up and came round to her side, pressing his flushed cheek against the pale one, smoothing the soft hair, and catching at the imploring hands.

"Oh, mother, mother, listen and forgive! If you could look into my soul—its blackness, its hunger, its mad struggles —you would bid me go."

Oh, pitiless youth! In the impatient intensity of his pain he forgot hers. Perhaps God has willed wisely that the soul of the child should not be so far reaching as that of the parent, else the weight of care would crush.

"I do not make you happy. I fret my father continually. I am so different from either of you. Mother, where did I get this nature?" he went on vehemently.

A look of stony terror seemed to freeze in her face. Was that old time, buried she thought in a deep, hidden grave, rising up to confront her? Her tongue was dry and dumb, her lips seemed for the moment palsied.

"You will be happier without me. You and he can live your self-denying, blameless lives, and work for the salvation of the perishing, if so be that you can save. And I shall be trying my strength with the gray old world beyond, in a hand-to-hand fight. If I have anything, I must wrest it from fate!"

His face was in a strange, passionate glow: the eyes sublimed to daring intensity, the hair thrown back from his forehead like

an aureole of sunset, the scarlet lips parted, showing the strong white teeth. So brave, so beautiful; but God made him *hers* first of all!

"No," she said. "If you go, you will take my very life. Better a hundred times to die by your hand, here at your feet, than to know the long, long agony of starvation! Oh, Victor!"

He raised himself and studied her. A grave face always, looking as if some light, sad to miss, had gone out of it. But to-night, the terror and apprehension in it startled him. He felt himself on an uncertain sea again, with no chart or compass.

"No, you could not go," she began in a slow, wandering tone. "There are the indentures, you know,—your father's word and your own."

"As if——?" But he came to a sudden pause.

"It *does* hold you," clinging to the words with her soft voice, like the drowning mariner to a floating spar. "And it is not so long to wait. Next May—you can go honorably then. Don't begin life wrong, with a meanness that would always make you ashamed!"

He flushed hotly.

"I don't know that I owe any one—much! I went to the business against my will."

It was too true; she knew it. In this sore strait her mind seemed to grow confused.

"For my sake! for my sake! Have children no pity?"

He stared at her blankly. There had been times when he fancied her placid, yielding nature deficient in any of the stronger passions. But how strangely it was roused now! The deep eyes were like lakes of subtle, quivering flame.

"Mother," he said, "if you knew all!"

"Tell me."

"It is so hard to stay there. No companionship, no interest, a weary dragging out of the days like a galley-slave! And every month, every week, the longing has grown upon me. To

be free, to be the veriest vagabond on the face of the earth, so that I might come and go at will, try all things until I found the one which satisfied me, filled my soul with boundless content."

"It can never come in this world;" shaking her head sadly.

"But it *does* to some."

"Who first learn to moderate their desires? In this life of probation—"

"Mother, don't!" as if he had been suddenly stung. "I know the preachers' theory. But does God fill human souls with high, pure aspirations, courage to do, patience to wait, and hope—only that you must strangle them all in the way, stamp them down into nameless graves, and do continually that which you hate? Then your God, and that of my father, is cruel."

"Oh Victor, think how you are talking!" she cried beseechingly.

"I cannot help it," with a kind of sullen despair. "It has been forced upon me. God knows that I tried to believe, tried to cheat myself into the semblance of content. But why should a man lie against his own soul? I will no longer attempt to practise this deceit. I am restless, miserable, perhaps possessed of a devil—who knows?" gloomily.

He looked as if he might be, with that lurid light in his eyes.

"Pray, pray!" she implored.

"For what shall I pray? Freedom to follow out my own devices? For that is the only thing I need."

"And yet you were once happy in—in your father's way." And she seemed to question him with her slow, sad eyes.

"I fancied so; but I have fallen from grace."

"My grace shall be sufficient for thee?" she said, in the low tone of repetition.

"Perhaps I never had any. I think I yielded in part to my father's importunity. And this old demon of unrest, that must have been born with me, was always goading me to something.

Since I could not have it in the companionship of brothers and sisters, I ought to have had it in the free life of other boys. But I was strictly brought up—you know that. Once I smuggled some books into the house, and my father burnt them. He put me in a machine-shop because I liked clean hands, and tidy collars, and wristbands. It was to crush out my pride, to make a man of me, to bring me on a level with the poorest of God's creatures! I was to despise no one, to feel myself above no one; and, mother, I tell you in all honesty, that if I ever fancied that I should come down to the level of Connor and Garrick, I should open a vein, and let out the life-blood that pains you by this continual rebellion."

"He did not mean that—he did not mean that!" she cried, wildly. "He goes among such men, and labors to raise them! His whole pure, self-sacrificing life is spent in it. He lives on a crust and water, that he may minister to the bodies of the destitute as well as their souls. He is a good man!"

"With a narrow creed. I don't know why—he is my father, but there *is* an antagonism between us. His likes, and aims, and wishes are not mine. He thwarts me in my tenderest points. So it is best for us to go our separate ways. Other sons try the world for themselves."

"Oh, you will never know *all* you owe him."

"I don't understand how we incur such debts. Do we ask to be born? And is it not the mother who cradles us in her tired arms, who soothes us through our restless nights, who stands between us and harm,—displeasure, even? For I think, sometimes, in my boyhood he would have struck me but for your beseeching eyes. I am glad that he never did. But I owe you—oh, a thousand times the more."

He kissed the cold, colorless lips with the sudden rapture of a man's love.

"Then I take the debt," she said, almost joyfully. "Pay me by staying. Finish your time honorably. Some day you may be glad to have no stain upon your name."

"But it is so hard," he moaned.

"My son, a mother's love may lighten the burden, even if you cast out the higher support."

"Did I cast it out?—I think I never understood it as you and my father do. I wanted the peace it promised, and I clung to something. I prayed. I fancied that I heard voices in the air, and yielded with great joy. God will bear me witness that I meant to be honest."

"And if you had kept the faith," she gasped.

"The old discontent and rebellion came back, the longing for a new and different life, the man's awakening when he has ceased to be a child, the conflicting forces of the soul. Submission to the inevitable may be a virtue, but my lot *can* be changed, and that is why I beat against my prison-bars. Why then did the faith die, if it was grounded upon the Rock? No, mother, we were all mistaken, I never had it."

Her eyes were downcast, sorrowful.

"And I ask myself if I shall ever find it! But there seems so many more—"

"Not more necessary things, Victor;" in affright. "*He* said, 'Seek first the kingdom, and all these shall be added unto you.'"

"What has been added to my father? He spends his life for the grovelling souls down yonder; he gives his time, his energy, his ambitions, if he ever had any, for the miserable pittance—"

"No, for the love of Christ, for the crown incorruptible; and if so be any of those poor beings may prove worthy to wear it, his joy will be the greater. There is something higher than earthly ambition."

Her voice was strong and clear now, when she felt sure of her ground.

"Did he think so in his youth?"

"No—at least—I did not know him then. He was a grave, kindly man when I first met him—not young; but I think he never could have had any restless longings or ambitions."

"And I am so different. The blood of some old ancestors runs in my veins rather than his. Can I help it?"

The hand on his arm shivered a little, the breath came in hurried gasps, and the startled eyes gazed into vacancy, to the garden without, to the grove of trees beyond; anything rather than her child's face. What did she fear to read there?

"You are disappointed because I am not more like him—my father. In those days you loved him with a passion, I suppose, as young girls do. He was your ideal. And it seemed strange to find a hawk where one looked for a dove, in the nest."

"What do you know about love?" she said, hoarsely.

"Only what I read, and—imagine."

"He loved me," as if she were talking to herself. "He was one man out of a thousand. You can never understand all his nobleness."

He smiled a little pityingly. Did women always cling thus to the heroes of their youth? see in their commonplace virtues knightly grace and prowess? A hard, cold, rigid, self-contained man, he should have said, with only average ability, and not concentrating in either person or mind the beauty or tenderness necessary to win a woman's undying love.

"No," he made answer. "There are many things about him that I shall never understand. And it seems to me that our paths lie in different directions."

"But not now. Bear it a little longer for my sake. Be victor over yourself."

Her voice moved him strangely, in spite of the hot impatience of youth, in spite of all his resolves. Perhaps it would have been better if he had risen while the morning stars were still in the sky, and begun his pilgrimage mountain-ward, leaving behind him only the note he had planned so many times that afternoon. Ah, he could not tell now. It might be that he did owe some duty.

He went round to his place, and sat down in the quaint

splint-bottomed chair, thinking oddly enough that it was his father's work, and that he could, in country parlance, "turn his hand to anything"—even shoemaking; and that brought a sense of aversion, disgust. So he finished his berries slowly, sipped the tea, but ate no more.

While he sat by the window watching the twilight flank the woods in grotesque shapes, as if posting sentinels from some weird world, his mother began to pile up her cups and saucers, and set away the remnants of provision, watching him stealthily.

Yes, he was handsome, with more in his youthful face than one usually discerns, or at least the mother's partial eyes had discovered it long ago. Tall, straight, supple, rounded with surpassing symmetry; hands browned and hardened by toil, but shapely as if carved out of marble, and feet that were their counterpart. Nobler than the vision she had seen long ago, for all the smile was cynical instead of sweet; the eyes almost fiery in their impatience; the brows contracting with every trifling emotion.

And what of his soul? Her life had been so quiet, so governed by rules springing from the wishes of another, that she had hardly looked at her child's future in the light in which she now saw it. Some old taint of ancestry cropping out that terrified her.

When the dishes were washed and put away, and the table moved to its accustomed place, she came and stood by her son, threading his silken hair with her soft fingers, and starting a little at the bounding throb in his temples.

"It is a hard fight, my son."

"Yes."

"I think God never turned away from the soul that cried unto Him."

"I have cried!" gloomily.

"With faith?"

"Not with faith,—rather despair. For I have no faith in what can be done here. When I go away—"

"You will wait until you can go honorably." Something in her voice appeared to guide and repress.

"I will wait." He uttered the words coldly, and they gave her no secret thrill. He had yielded from a sense of persuasion, perhaps duty, not any tender son's love for her, not any pity for her loneliness.

And then she thought of another who had not hesitated to trample upon her crushed and bleeding soul, to leave her perishing by the wayside; and of the good Samaritan who had bound up the wounds and given her a home in his heart freely. To which of the two owed she the most fealty?

The darkness fell around them. A cricket began to chirp in the corner, adding his voice to the chorus outside. Far down the woods the Whip-poor-will sent out his plaintive note; and the fire-flies sunned themselves in each other's radiance. All was still and lovely, and the air made fragrant with the dewy sweet-brier.

But neither of them spoke. She drew her low rocking-chair beside him, and began to sing in a soft, untrained voice, a grand old hymn, for she had long ago done with sweet girlish ballads.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace."

The sound and the words passed idly through the son's ears. He was brooding over the wreck of plans that looked so fair and feasible a few hours ago. Almost ten months to wait. Oh, if he had not yielded so weakly, so easily. After all, was it any point of honor? His father had bound him at the Norcross Machine Works, knowing that he disliked it; that he had no taste for the business, except a peculiar vein for mechanics which cropped out now and then in some odd improvement about the house, or a fantastic design of drawing, rude yet bold.

For John Hurst had a horror of lawless, vagabondish ways. This boy, who had now and then played truant from school,

spent nights in the mountain wilds, and whom he had once found playing cards at the tavern, needed the strictest watch and ward to keep him from going to ruin. Some alien blood ran in his veins.

At sixteen the bonds had been entered into. A tall, slender stripling then, standing in strange awe of his father. Now he was little past twenty.

But he, clinching his fist softly in the darkness, wondered how deep a debt he owed John Hurst. Ah, how short-sighted and ungrateful is youth! A little money, he fancied, would make it all straight between them. And if he managed to earn that sum and send it to them, the rest of his time and his daily life would be his own, subject to no scrutiny. But ah, the long intervening months!

The voice faltered its last tender cadence, and they sat silent in the dark, her eyes seeming to wander over his face with a pathetic hungering. Day and night it was ever present to her mind, for the mother vision was always illumined. But the fingers trailed slowly over his, and a few foolish tears quietly dropped. *Her* son should have been a gentleman.

"Victor," she said presently, and her voice sounded like an angel's, cleaving the darkness, "I think you will never regret the sacrifice you have made for my sake."

"Not for your sake," almost ungraciously. His heart was so sore and tossed about by the whirlwind of defeat. "That my father's word might not be broken. He shall not say that I marred his good name."

"Thank you in his stead. And if you could be happy in the consciousness of duty—"

"No, I cannot; at least, not until I am sure which is my duty. If it is right to stay in this place and become a clod, to stifle all those keen and fine aspirations,—for something in my soul tells me that I might do a nobler work than moulding steel and iron into various given shapes. However, it is all done;" with a bruskness in his voice. "I'll wait until I'm twenty-one,

and then no man shall be my master. I'll draw a free breath for once."

He rose and groped his way to the mantel, striking a match so savagely that the phosphorus fell on the hearth at his feet. Then another, and this time he lighted the candle.

"Good-night;" coldly, going toward the door.

"Good-night;" over seas of tears that would fall unheeded by her child.

The dull, smothered fires had broken out at last. The lurid breath seemed to scorch her very soul. Would it have been if this boy had never known any guardianship but hers? Ah, would anything have been better? The hard present was here, and if it carried the result of mistakes and failures, lapsing into it from that far past, what then? Nothing could be undone; that was dreariest misery of all!

So she sat there crying softly. Did God keep watch and ward over all, and heed the call of useless ravens? For twenty years she had been trying to do her duty faithfully, and the child of her love, of her anxious hours and many prayers, was ready to turn away and leave her desolate.

After awhile, ten o'clock, perhaps, she heard a slow, weary step coming down the street, and springing up lighted her candle, giving a glimpse at herself as she passed the little mirror. Not to see if her dusky hair was smooth, or her plain collar neat as usual. But she pulled out a little bunch of withered madeira blossoms, still sweet, and started at the heavy eyes, with the dark circle about them plainly visible.

"You are tired, John," she said, with gentle pity, as he sank into a chair.

"The flesh is weak—yes; and poor human nature shrinks from watching even one hour with the Master in His agony."

He wiped his pale face and drew a long breath.

"Was the man very ill?"

"Yes. He has gone to his last account. Oh, why will men put off the great work of salvation until the hour of death?

Why will they slight the mercy held out to them until the very grave opens to receive them, and the jaws of hell yawn beyond? If they find a limit to God's mercy, they have but themselves to blame."

"We cannot set limits," she returned, gently.

Somehow she pitied these poor creatures with a new and infinite pity to-night. If she, with her opportunities, went groping around in the dark, how much more they?

"As the tree falls, so it shall lie. There is no device in the grave."

How hard and cold the text seemed, merciless even! And yet this morning she would have preached it without a misgiving.

"Will you not have a cup of tea?" she asked, timidly. "I kept the kettle upon the coals."

"Why should I pamper my vile body to-night? Rather it should be fasting and prayer for those poor souls possessed by devils, who are hourly rushing down to perdition."

She spread a napkin over the table and brought out a plate of bread, and filled a glass with cool water.

"Or if you will have milk—" with a little hesitation.

"No."

He bowed his head reverently, and half unconsciously she followed the motion. Yet her heart ached to see him sit over the ascetic meal after his long hours of both mental and physical strain. Her heart was so tender and pitiful! All these years of rigid life had not hardened it.

"It was terrible!" he began, presently. "The man had met with a shocking accident—his limbs crushed to a jelly, and the woman, his wife, was half stupefied with liquor. Last winter they both came to the chapel for awhile, and I hoped the seed might be sown in good ground. Am I an unprofitable servant to the Master?"

"You shall not perplex yourself about it to-night, dear. You look pale and worn; and you need rest for both body and mind."

Her voice was very gentle and persuasive; and now she raised her eyes to his face, knowing well that he would be too preoccupied with his thoughts to find traces of her weeping.

"Rest—with the whole world lying in wickedness! Do we believe God's truth? Are we shepherds of ruined and stray souls?"

She was silent, having learned, long ago, that in these nervous and highly-wrought moods no words could soothe, and that quiet was best. Yet somehow she longed to stand beside him in drooping tenderness, to brush the straggling gray hair from his brow, and kiss the pale, thin lips.

Between these two—the man whose whole soul had been given to the salvation of his fellow-creatures, and the youth so engrossed in wild dreams—her being was almost rent assunder. Longing to love and to do, they crowded her out of their plans and aims, leaving the uncounted wealth of her woman's heart to be poured out uselessly. The cruelest sting of all was in that.

John Hurst was nearing sixty. With youth, health, and vigor, he might have been prepossessing; now you would pass him by with hardly a second thought. Barely medium height—his son had far outstripped him, of a rather loose, awkward figure—now that it was so thin and angular. For the shoulders were still broad, though the chest was considerably shrunken, and the coarse, faded black coat hung loosely over it. His face was closely shaven, and strongly marked. High cheek-bones that left great hollows underneath, a short and rather thick nose, deep set, light-gray eyes, and a forehead somewhat high and narrow, though with a certain boldness. But the lower jaw was quite square, and gave a dominant expression to the face.

It indicated a strong nature held in abeyance by certain fixed rules. The man's will was iron, bowing only to his stern conscience and his religion. He had cast out the graces of youth as so many snares of the devil. Saint Paul was not

a more rigid moralist, not more stern in his self-denials. I think he had come to fashion himself on that grand old model, with his own translation of it. There remained not a point around which imagination might play. Every thought, every emotion was subjected to the severest scrutiny. He would have plucked out his right eye, or cut off his right hand, literally, if thereby he might have served God the better.

If you had brought Victor down and placed him beside his father, you would have found not one sign of likeness. The boy was right—some old trick of ancestry must have been revived at his birth, some mark stronger in its organization and power than these two people could have given him.

CHAPTER IV.

When John Hurst placed his son Victor at the Norcross Machine Works, he fancied that he had done a wise thing for the boy. They had been living at Weareham about a year, and during that time Victor had been in and out of half a dozen situations. He was quick to resent, and answered back with more spirit than most employers admire. The weeks between situations were the happiest time of all, for he rambled about aimlessly, picking up odd bits of knowledge, but growing more wayward and difficult to manage with every day.

The "Works" had won a good deal of prestige under old Mr. Norcross. He had retired with a competency to ease and Missionary meetings. He and his wife took a great deal of interest in the religious affairs of all countries, according to their faith. It was through the old gentleman's influence that John Hurst had come to Weareham.

"A hard-working, self-denying man; just the one for a home missionary. I think he would soon build up an interest at the Corners. He is not one of your fine clergymen, who carry a scented handkerchief in any miserable hovel to purify the air."

Taking the advice, the Board of Missions, at their yearly meeting, had extended to John Hurst a call to come and labor among them. There was the usual talk about the field being white for harvest, the laborers few, the enemy sowing tares, and all the opportune or inopportune figures of speech.

John Hurst thought he heard the Master's voice in it, and came. The district assigned to him was the outskirts of the factories, where the ignorant, the poorly paid, the vicious herded together. The Church spent something to redeem

them, the City and State still more, and yet they were not redeemed.

John Hurst had worked among them for more than five years. They had promised him six hundred a year, but it was oftener five. The Rev. Mr. Underwood, his special clerical adviser, had a flourishing church and a rather stylish parsonage: Brussels carpets, lace curtains, furniture that combined both ease and elegance. His station demanded it. He was much higher in the social scale than his poor brother in the Lord. The elder Norcrosses used to go and take tea in state, and send their pastor rich presents. Occasionally they would speak of John Hurst.

"An excellent man, a most ex-cel-lent man," and the Reverend Underwood would rub his hands together with peculiar unction. "He is doing a good work among the poor heathen at home."

So they classed the poor heathen and Mr. Hurst together, and let them go.

John Hurst went at his work courageously. Some ten years before this, he thought he had been called of the Lord, and he gave up all expectations of worldly ease and advancement to follow. What downfall of blindly climbing hopes there had been to Anah Hurst's life no one ever knew. A grave, reticent woman, with a shadow in her soft eyes, ready to follow her husband anywhere.

He felt himself particularly drawn toward the poor and ignorant. He had very little pride or ambition, in a worldly sense, and he did give up everything for the cause he had espoused. To him the salvation of souls was of earnest, vital importance—the loss of them, agony itself. He just as much believed that a man dying without any open declaration of faith in Christ went straight to perdition, as he believed in God himself. He leaned more toward the Law than the Gospel, toward the terror than the mercy; but it was because he was so fearfully in earnest.

His son's peculiar and restless habits often tried him sorely. He was a stern man in every relation of life, or at least he had grown sterner since the weight of souls pressed so heavily upon him. He barred out noisy boyish pleasures from the child's life, and would fain have kept him in the straight and narrow path, but Victor's feet seemed to have a fondness for by-paths and intricate ways.

One day he ventured to ask some advice of his clerical brother.

"Why not send him away to school," said the superior, absently.

"He has little taste for books, and,—since he has his own way to make in the world—"

"Ah—yes, I see;" stroking his patriarchal beard, thoughtfully. "Some kind of store business;" and he pondered the feasibility of grocer's clerk.

"I cannot keep him in a store—he is too unsettled."

"A trade, then, brother Hurst. There's nothing like a trade for boys. It tides them over the dangerous years; for if a boy is bound, there he must stay. It gives them steady, industrious habits."

"Yes," returned Hurst; and that instant he decided upon a trade. Why had he not thought of it before, in his perplexity?

"And while I think of it, you can't do a better thing than place him at the Norcross Works. James and William are both fine men, fine men," in his pompous way, as if it had been partly through his instrumentality. "And it is an excellent business. Why, it is said," lowering his voice a trifle, as if there might be treason in the admission, "that brother Norcross began life without a dollar—and a good trade. One of the first men in Weareham."

James Norcross was at the head of the Works. William did the travelling and out-of-door business. James followed in his father's footsteps, was a pillar of the Church, and orna-

ment of society. A fine looking man, with a strong, shrewd, yet pleasant face. To him went John Hurst, and the contract was entered into immediately.

Great was the anger and indignation of Victor.

"At least you might have chosen something decently clean," he flung out, disrespectfully. "I hate it! I never will go!"

"You know nothing about it," was the stern rejoinder. "I am the proper one to choose for you."

I think, but for his mother's sake, Victor Hurst would have run away. He loved her passionately at that time, and her grief and suffering won from him what his father's commands could not have done—acquiescence. Not without a hard struggle, however.

She had interceded for her boy as mothers rarely do.

"Anah," he said, with a quiet resolve that somehow always awed her, "let me decide this matter. Do you think that I have not the boy's good at heart? Another year of such life as he has been leading would be the ruin of him. He is wilful, headstrong; chooses his associates from among the most lawless, and in a little while will defy any authority. I have yielded to you in many other things which have not been for his good, as you have plainly seen. Will you help him on the downward path?"

"Oh, John, let us try once more, once more. Perhaps I understand him better. I am his mother—"

Her eyes overflowed with tears, and drooped with apparent shame as John Hurst turned his own full upon her.

"Will you let me save him or not?" and his voice seemed to fall on her heart like drops of molten lead, withering, crushing. "You know what I said *then*, Anah! Have I not kept my word? Have I not done all things in my power for your sake? And now choose this day whom he shall serve. If it is God and the right, so far as in you lies, I will help to my utmost; if not, I wash my hands of him. Let your foolish indulgence rescue him if it can."

She remembered her past, and what he had done for her. If the boy had been different, what delight would he not have taken in him! It was Victor who had made the first disturbance, and surely in all those early years John Hurst had been very patient with him. If the lad came to ruin now—through her weak love. She seemed to understand so little of men's natures, she knew next to nothing of the temptations outside. John was among them every day, in hovels, taverns, prisons. And oh, most of all, she wanted her boy clean and pure, as white in soul as John Hurst.

"Do what is best," she answered, humbly; and then she set herself to work to smooth over the path for her child, and persuade him to yield.

There was one curious thing in it all that Victor Hurst could not explain even now. He had always felt afraid of his father when it came to an open struggle; but John Hurst had never struck the lad, as he himself bore witness. The power was something deeper than any physical force.

Victor yielded sullenly. He had no choice of trades or place. I am not sure but he would have been better satisfied with a peddler's pack and freedom. But all these years the slow general dislike had been culminating into a special hatred. Because Norcross was a gentleman, it did not follow that his workmen were. Now and then some choice hand came from over the water, with old-world ways, like Connor and Garrick; the latter of whom hardly had his equal in the country for tempering steel.

Victor tried to keep in with his boyish friends at first, but his father's keen surveillance was too much. If he remained out late of an evening, both parents sat up until the hour of his return. Once John Hurst had fetched him home from a roystering company of card-players. Well for him, perhaps, as some of the crowd found themselves in jail before daylight.

And then came a brief change. One of those spasmodic revivals which sweep the length and breadth of the land drew Victor Hurst in its current. For awhile his mother was almost

in heaven. She had never known so sweet a satisfaction in her whole life.

Was the creed too narrow, that he outgrew it so soon? For the hymns, and prayers, and sermons lost their power; and after that a dread and terrible vacuity fell upon him. Everything failed to charm. The fires of the soul roused for an instant, and then, unemployed, burned sullenly, leaving a blackened desert waste.

From that time the rebellion had gone on gaining strength. But one favorable feature in it was that he outgrew the old companions as well. A new and finer sense seemed springing up within him; but with every day's unfolding, his toil, from being simply distasteful, became an abhorrence.

So he had made another struggle and failed. He thought it over bitterly in the silence of his room. Was there some fate to step in always? But he had given fair warning now. Next May he would be a free man, and August was half gone.

Out here, in this half country-place, the night dews soon cooled the air and the roofs of the houses. Soft airs went wandering by, sentient with a life that touched him, and that he could not understand, which perplexed him from its vastness, its underlying strand of solemn yet exquisite pleasures.

Presently, he shook out a roll of drawings. Not valves, and pistons, and wheels, and rings—his taste did not run that way. Some quaint severe studies—a massive arm and clinched swelling fist, a shapely ankle and foot, a few faces rude almost to savageness, but wonderfully expressive.

"No, I'm not a genius," he commented, with a kind of regal scorn. "But if I could have a fair chance—if the world does not crowd me too hard—yes, the only salvation is to go away."

He took up his pencil, but did not draw any. It fell from his listless fingers presently, and the delicate chin dropped upon his breast, the eyes wandering far off into some visionary future. For the soul that stirred within him seemed so strong,

so capable. If there was only a place in which to begin! If he had been some other man's son, with the birthright of wealth and culture!

He scarcely stirred until he heard his father enter. The low hum of voices floated up to him, and once he rose, walking slowly toward the window. The vast, silent night brooded over all. Millions of stars that might be worlds trembled in infinite space. Did God hold them all in the hollow of His hand? Was there any power great enough for that; and if so, would this wonderful possessor of all knowledge trouble Himself about the paltry concerns of human beings here, and the low, vile souls down in Kent's Lane? Did He demand that any other life should be spent in the useless effort of humanizing them—just as John Hurst was doing? For he remembered hearing his mother say once, that his father had given up a good business to become a minister.

Victor slept rather late the next morning, and was aroused by his mother's voice. When he entered the tidy kitchen his father was in his place by the small stand, an open Bible before him. The same old life, with nothing unchanged in it.

The morning prayer, simple, touching in its fervor; for the man was earnest and honest. No one was forgotten—the son in the family circle, the souls stranded on desert shores perishing by hundreds, and grace for his own, lest after having preached to others he himself might become a castaway.

Anah Hurst poured the coffee, and waited upon the table with a sweet, silent grace. She seemed very beautiful to Victor this morning, though she was paler than usual.

"Where is your napkin?" she asked, presently, not finding it in the basket.

"Oh—" and he remembered the outburst of yesterday. "I did not bring it home. Never mind my lunch, mother. I do not want any."

"Why?" And she glanced up with a strange misgiving.

"It is too warm to eat at noon."

"But to wait all day—" and the mother's heart was seized with a chill foreboding.

"I can't eat it;" and the emphasis was impatient, though he did not mean it to be so.

John Hurst took a slow survey of his son, and for a moment appeared to be on the verge of speaking, then checked himself and was silent.

"If I want anything, I will buy a few crackers," said Victor.

Just at the door he turned back and gave his mother a glance. If she could have seen what was in his heart, she need not have shivered with such deadly fear.

"Good-morning."

No tender kiss, no little fondness between the mother and child. Was it right? Did God demand the sacrifice of all human love?

Was it God? When she allowed John Hurst to interpret His teaching, and resigned herself to a guidance she thought so much wiser than her own, was she not disloyal to something higher than man's interpretation? And farther back—had she elected rightly in the choice of this child's father?

For it had come to this, that father and son were drifting wider apart with every day that passed. To which should she cling? Ah, if it came to that—

"Anah," her husband said, "after your dishes are put away, get your bonnet and walk down to Kent's Lane with me. They need a woman's hands in that God-forsaken place, and a woman's voice might find its way to souls that I cannot reach."

She was sore-hearted and weary herself, longing for some tender words—how, then, should she comfort others? And the anchor to which her faith had been securely bound these many years, had slipped its moorings, dragging her over rough rock and shifting sands.

"Not this morning," she said, with a strange tremor in her voice.

"Is not God's work of more importance than ours?" in a slow, grave tone.

"It is not that, not that," wanderingly, as if the sound of her own voice amazed her. "But I am not well;" with a shiver.

He guessed that she was fretting inwardly because Victor had refused his lunch. If it had been from any other cause he might have endeavored to persuade.

"Well," with a kind of wounded gravity, "I will do my best alone."

And then he went out. She watched him down the street, shambling awkwardly along. Anah Hurst was in a peculiarly sensitive mood this morning. It seemed to jar upon some nice sense or old remembrance of better times. Quite an old man already, and losing the vigor that once characterized him. Again the thought entered her mind—had she done wisely in marrying John Hurst? If it came to an open issue, which would be dearer, husband or child?

She went around in a weary, listless fashion. A cloud appeared to overshadow her; something awesome and intangible. The poor helpless souls down in Kent's Lane were as nothing to her to-day.

She had just spread up Victor's bed, and was tenderly caressing the branch of woodbine that he was training round the window inside, many shades paler than its wild, riotous companions without, when a quick, manful step startled her. She glanced down—he looked up and smiled. In another instant he had mounted the stairs.

"Victor!"

But the fresh, eager face was not one to create alarm. No fatal conspiracy was hidden in these genial lines.

"I can't help it," he exclaimed with a boy's eagerness. "I'm glad of the holiday, for it would have half killed me to go on."

"But what has happened?"

"Oh!" and he tried to look grave because he thought he must. "Old Mr. Norcross died last night, and is to be buried to-morrow. The Works will be shut up for two days."

"And you—?"

"I am going off for a ramble—where, I cannot tell. Nay, do not look disquieted. I shall do nothing that will shock you. I want to run off to the mountains for a breath of fresh, free air. Put me up a little bread—anything you may happen to have—and to-morrow night you will see me again."

It had been so long since he had worn such a smile. The old gloomy frown was a thing of the past, dropped with the work-day world.

"And you are glad to go?" with a touching sadness in her tone.

"Glad!" He came nearer, placed his hands gently upon her shoulders, she realizing with a little pang how very far he had outgrown her. And then a kind of confused flush suffused his face.

"Yes, I am glad! You do not want me to tell an untruth about it. Should I be the happier for staying here in a gloomy frame of mind because—because a man is dead? If his faith was true, he is better in heaven to-day; and then he was an old man. But life and freedom are sweet to me, so let me enjoy them in my rare holiday."

"I will not persuade you to stay;" and she choked down the great throb of pain in her throat. "But you will come back?"

"I promised you last night," he said, huskily. "I had a hard fight with my 'familiar,'" and his voice dropped still lower. "I told you that my father should have no cause to condemn me in *that* matter. So I shall return to-morrow night."

She went down stairs. He threw off his gray blouse with an air of disdain, and habited himself in last night's attire. A small roll of paper, a pencil, and note-book were thrust into a travelling satchel. Then he rejoined his mother.

"There is so little," she said, regretfully. "If I had known—"

"A crust of bread will taste good out there under the trees, flavored with freedom. It is sufficient."

He packed it in and shut the clasp with a sharp click.

"Good-by—nothing will happen to me, save that I shall be the better for the change."

He flung the strap over his shoulder, and stooping, gave her a long, tender kiss,—so sudden, so sweet, that it brought the tears to her eyes.

"I am an ungrateful dog," he exclaimed, vehemently. "You *do* love me. Mother! Mother!"

The words still rang in her ears as she saw him striding over toward the woods, a young Apollo, the sun glinting on his tawny hair, his limbs strong, supple, graceful, his step light, his whole air joyous as a bird. And an hour's freedom had so changed him.

Oh, God! what if he had been born free!

CHAPTER V.

An hour's freedom! The first perfect holiday of his life rather. For over such anniversaries as Christmas, New Year, Thanksgiving, and Fourth of July, John Hurst had hitherto kept strict watch. He labored for this child's soul with an earnestness that could hardly have failed to touch an older person. But the seeds of heathenism spring up apace in youth; and perhaps, having once turned from the narrow way in a kind of disgust, it left him in a mood for the license of the fascinating broad path.

When he listened to the announcement of the death, his first thought was what he should do with the two days; his second, a decision. He would go off to solitude. Not altogether in the fashion of the monks of old—there should be little fasting or praying, but much enjoyment. No narrow bounds to chafe against, no measured words to rasp the sensitive nerves of his soul with every-day practical uses. None of his kind even, for Victor Hurst had reached that morbid, misanthropic state where he fancied that his fellow-creatures were all in league against him. Youth so often mistakes self-torture for heroism.

He plunged into the wood, cleared of its under-brush by the continual forays of gleaning. He took the direct path through, and traversed the open country until he reached the foot of the range of mountains, merely high hills at this point, but breaking the scenery for miles beyond with their purple crest. Through the next valley flowed a river, a lovely stream emptying miles farther on into the Susquehanna. He wanted to see the place once again.

The day was less scorching than the preceding one. A soft gray under-roof of cloud lingered above the tree-tops in hazy tenderness, yet our traveller was warm and tired. It was noon already, so he sat down to rest, plucking some half-ripe summer grapes, the acid quenching his thirst. The winding road lay like a silver cord between the masses of foliage on either side, the sunshine now and then straggling through in dim, golden lights. There was the cool plashing of a stream at some little distance, coming faintly to his ears on the low wind. Squirrels ran in and out and chattered with an amusing air of importance, a cricket began to chirp at his feet, and myriads of tiny insects swung in the soft woodland mosses, or drowsed in some tiny flower-cup.

It was so different from the world down yonder! He could believe in a God out here—he had lapsed that far into heathenism that he had begun to question the existence of a Supreme Being; but here he saw His handiwork, His majesty, as if it was not writ in the souls of those who grovelled in the valley!

After awhile he took the bread out of his knapsack, for today he was hungry. A bird hopped up the rich turf at his feet, and he threw her some crumbs, laughing at the manner in which she turned one eye upon him.

Hark! what was that?

For a gale of melody quivered through the trees—something that was not summer wind blown about, nor voices of dryads disporting themselves. A tremble of exquisite sound, at which the wind paused to find itself mocked, the leaves stood still and questioned each other mutely, and the distant brook ceased to babble for very shame.

Had Victor Hurst been better read in mythological lore he might have dreamed himself into an Arcadian trance; as it was, he sprang up and listened, placing his hand behind his ear and bending his head, which had the pose an artist would have loved, a kingly Titan head, with its cloud of tawny hair.

"A wanderer like myself, mayhap, but oh, the voice of music! Was ever sound so sweet?"

As he listened it seemed to grow nearer and more distinct. Nothing save a violin could so translate the fine harmonies of nature, thrilling the spaces with a half human voice. Now it was a lark "singing at heaven's gate," anon a rustle of summer wind through the pines, and then the careless trill of happy song.

"I must find him!" Victor exclaimed; his face aglow with interest.

With that he thrust the unfinished bread back into its receptacle, and the bunch of unripe grapes. Hunger, thirst, and the morbid distaste of his kind vanished at once.

Guided by the sound, he began to climb, having first cut a stout walking-stick. His ear was wonderfully acute, and he could tell in a few moments whether he swerved to the right or to the left.

Presently the melody ceased, but he still kept on. Through tangled wilds, luxuriant growth of rankest vines, and a few stray blossoming creepers with clusters of gorgeous flowers. Great rugged tree-trunks covered with festoons of bearded moss, or graceful hangings of some glossy parasite. Now and then a swaying branch lurched in his face, or a too familiar thorn caught him in its untender embrace. Nearer the top, vegetation grew less dense.

He gave a long, clear whistle that went trilling into the hollows, breaking into a hundred lingering echoes.

The sound of the violin reassured him. Farther down on the brow of the mountain—he had gone a little astray without a guide. But he trudged on with the vigor that so characterized the man. Nearer, nearer.

"Hillo, comrade!"

A laughing voice, hardly less musical than the sound evoked by skilful fingers. Through an opening he espied a figure reclining against a moss-covered oak.

Victor stopped short, and colored, partly with pleasure, partly with embarrassment.

"Advance, comrade," and the other half rose. There was a curious beguiling strand in his voice. Victor flushed boyishly and still hesitated.

"No Orpheus, you see, unless I have won my Eurydice of the other sex. Not even the Pied Piper; for only a few squirrels and one stray bird have responded."

"I heard the sound and followed," Victor said, half in apology.

"Thank you," laughingly. "Sit down. My sofas are luxuriant and covered with richest velvet. What can a king have that is lovelier?"

Victor glanced around, his eyes drooping bashfully at the speaker, who seemed less, and yet more than a man; a kind of unreal or fabulous personage.

A peculiar face and figure, its chief attribute being a wonderful, indolent grace. At the utmost he would be barely medium size, though his limbs were in perfect, harmonious proportion. The head was rather aristocratic, and the delicate face was one whose beauty grew upon you, though your first verdict would be against its apparent effeminacy. The features were finely cut, mobile, changing with every mood of their owner, when he chose, and none could be more reticent when the whim took him. The brow was that of a poet, the eyes large, soft, dreamy, wells of shady darkness, but infinitely tender, and with a glimpse of rare humor that might make him a satirist, but too generous ever to be bitter. There was a delicate mockery in every feature; in the smile, and you could detect it in the voice if you listened warily, yet it was not that of scorn or contempt; rather a genial sparkle, like that of the bead to wine.

Victor's first feeling was one of surprise, his next, a faint sense of disappointment. In his vague and undefined hunger, he fancied that it was strength and not weakness which his soul needed to satisfy its craving.

The other smiled inwardly at the stranger's perplexity, and the crudeness written upon the vigorous but immature face.

"Sit down," he said again. "You are warm and tired, and this is a little Eden—without the serpent. It was not all a myth, the old story. In the general wreck, fragments of beauty have been saved, and blossom as purely as in that far land. You like the music, I think!"

Without waiting for an answer he drew the bow across the strings, evoking a faint, wandering strain that grew stronger as it thrilled through the leafy arches.

If he was sounding the depths of the unformed boyish soul, he could hardly have touched more pathetic chords. Perhaps he guessed; for in their idle babble floated the melody of the distant stream, the voice of the whispering wind, and the even song of birds, with an under-current of pathos akin to pain, forceful touches that seemed to penetrate all the dim and hidden recesses of one's being; a vague, haunting sorrow that presently became a most exquisite torture.

"Not that," Victor cried in a tone of passionate pain. "It goes too deep, it is too true."

"Did I hurt you? Forgive me. There is a voice in it that will out sometimes, speaking through unguided fingers. Listen to this."

A gay little French chanson, with a rush and a ring that made the very air laugh in echo. He let the last note drop down amid the mosses and wild-flowers.

"That is better, perhaps, for to-night I play for peasants to dance, dreaming of their vineyards and olives, their black bread and wine. Will you bear a hand, comrade? Paul Latour at your service—a Bohemian of the Bohemians. Though why an industrious, stay-at-home people should be thus libelled, I cannot imagine. I like the old graceful and graceless "vagabond, better."

"Where do you find peasants?" asked Victor in amaze.

"At Bohmerwald, a dozen miles or so down the river."

"A settlement of —"

"Bona fide Bohemians that put our vagrant habits to shame. The women sing as they cut grain with a sickle, having learned nothing by the march of improvement, poor things!"

Victor had heard of the place, but thus far his travels had been necessarily restricted. Dancing and a violin! Why it would be going straight to the evil one! A smile crossed his scarlet lips.

Latour answered it.

"You will go? After a week's solitude a companion will be an agreeable change."

"I have a brief holiday. If I could be back to-morrow night"—hesitatingly. "But you know nothing about me," in surprise.

"I have no money of which to be robbed, and if I were murdered I should die with the consolation that I had been spared an uncomfortable old age. But you look honest enough, comrade. As for the rest—it is not worth a thought; and he laughed gayly. "Who needs vouchers for respectability out here in the woods? I am a vagabond myself!

"I am a merry beggar,
And a beggar I was born,
Tossed about the wide world
From evening until morn."

The voice in which he sang this was rich and mellow, and he ended with a peal of merriment that rippled down the hill-side in entrancing echoes.

To Victor the whole thing had the suggestion of an adventure. As well watch peasants dance as to be sleeping in the wood.

"Come. A crumb is as good as a feast sometimes, provided it have the right flavor. You shall be back to-morrow night—there is my hand upon it."

He reached out a small, girlish hand, but sun-burned to a point beyond his olive skin.

"I will go with you."

"Good. My boat lies down at the river's edge. It is past noon I believe, and the last of my luncheon was left farther up the hill for the squirrels. Enough was the feast, and to-night provides for itself."

"I have lunched," was the brief reply.

"Shall we find our way down the mountain, then? We can drowse and dream in the boat."

"As you like."

Latour rose with graceful agility. Yet Victor smiled oddly, —it seemed as if he might have perched the other on his shoulder and scarcely felt the weight.

"You are not a stranger here?" with a soft questioning glance.

"No;" blushing, "I live in the town beyond—I almost think you can see its black smoke going up to heaven as an abomination."

"You do not like the life down there?" in a peculiar tone.

"Like it! Does a man choose slavery of his own free will?" grinding his heel into the soft mosses, and crushing out swarms of insect life.

"There have been such anomalies, my friend. A regular life mapped out by hours: so much work, so much sleep, so much eating of fine bread and the fat of lambs, so much purple and linen, and one travels by easy stages to the grave. The white marble over you vouches for your respectability."

A light, ironical smile hovered about the lips, playing through the fine beard like some far ray of summer lightning.

"The purple may make one more content. But when it is serge and a crust—"

He paused with an abrupt, impatient gesture.

"That means—not a stiver to lose—a toss-up either way. Then I should take the freedom," glancing at him with keen eyes. "Why so brief a holiday?"

"With me it is another man's honor, another man's word;" giving a short, uncadenced laugh, that had in it the roused,

almost tigerish mood. "I go back because I must. Some chains never clank, you know, but they do worse."

"And you pay in groans for superior civilization! See what it is to have been born a vagabond!"

With that he touched the violin again, and carolled a brief snatch of Goethe's mill-song.

"Let us sing with the birds, my friend, before the next storm drenches us, and drives us to silence. And now, I bethink myself, that it is time to move on. Down this path, I believe. You know the way?"

"I have rambled over it a few times," with boyish hesitancy.

Latour vaulted over rocks, fallen trees, and matted undergrowth, as if he had been a practised gymnast. Victor was not far behind. But Latour broke into a wild gipsy chorus, while the other kept the silence of wonder. Something in the man won upon him curiously. Perhaps a touch of the free life as well.

They reached the shore ere long. The river widening in and out among the tall hills, its cool green taking tint from the overhanging foliage. In a sheltered nook lay a tiny bark moored to a broken stump.

"Embark, my friend. I cannot promise you Grecian isles, or groves of Admetus, but the place is not deficient in beauty. It needs only the old gods; but when Pan died, they vanished. Are the idols of gold and silver so much better, that men drain out their life-blood for them?"

Victor flushed swarthily in shame, and a consciousness of ignorance. Ah, if he could leave that old life behind!

They both stepped in. Latour took the oars.

"No, let me, if I shall not distress you by my awkwardness. I like it."

Latour seated himself in the stern, and laid his violin across his lap as if it had been a tender human nursling. For an instant, he almost envied the tawny Titan facing him, whose bright locks shook off glinting lights on the purple river air.

Not a coarse fibre in that brain, no craven blood in those full, throbbing veins.

"And such souls are coined into gold for grasping masters!" he mused. "Do they never dare break the chains forged by custom?"

The breeze died away—the river valley was profoundly still. On the one side, a series of hills rising one above the other; here gray and craggy with a faded growth of rock-moss, browned by the sun; there, in soft quivering lights, the wooden clumps creeping closer and stretching out long green arms. Far nooks in black shadow, a dead tree rising high and grim, rent and blackened by some fearful storm, jutting boldly out, flaunting the old tale of the nearness of death in the face of the few passers-by. The oar plashing into the resisting waters, making circles of foam and bringing into life thousands of fantastic echoes farther up the stream, as if wood-nymphs were holding high carnival.

"My friend, you take life too hard," Latour exclaimed, coming out of his reverie. "For the rowing is no question of life or death. No watchful dame will grumble if the tea be cold."

"But they expect you!"

"At seven, or thereabout. Do not fatigue yourself."

"Fatigue!" with an intonation of contempt.

"Do not turn pleasure into pain, then. It is the evil of our life. A rare old philosopher once said, that curses were only distorted blessings."

Victor laughed with a pleasant sound in his voice, and his face relaxed a trifle.

"You are right," he returned. "We have the whole afternoon before us, and it is not so far. But I was thinking—"

"A dangerous employment, comrade. Can it help or hinder? And the grand secret of life lies in extracting the sweet and leaving the bitter."

"But some one has to take that."

"If any poor benighted soul longs for it, and can be happy on a supper of thistles only, I, for one, will not stand in the way. But you should have a fancy for ripe, rare flavors, the bloom of the peach, and the purple frost of the grape; or your nature has gone astray with some hard wrench."

"My nature!" catching up the words eagerly. "If you can read beneath the surface—"

"Sometimes," nodding his head and gazing dreamily at the opposite shore. "I have seen many men—much of life—in others."

Self-knowledge is perhaps the most fascinating of all lore to the young. To dive down into unknown depths and stir up pearls with a great pang, to probe the far recesses of being and the mysteries by which it is surrounded, even if the questions are unanswerable, is like manna to famishing souls.

"Read mine," he said. It was rather command than entreaty.

Latour sent a peal of soft, elfin notes over the water. Victor looked perplexed, angered. His face showed too plainly the space his moods traversed, the highest heaven and the nethermost hell possible to him, that indeed lay brooding in the great, unquiet soul, goading him so often into rebellion against the fate that girded him about like fire.

"A restless soul, if you will; a soul of giant needs, and wants, and daring. You are too late for your era. You should have been born with the old Crusaders."

He dimly remembered Godfrey of Boulogne, and Bertrand du Guesclin, the forbidden romance of his boyhood.

"But I was not," he replied bitterly.

"And the hot blood chafes in your veins. The days of foolish chivalry are over. To-day half matured bodies and brains go about seeking a great work; meddling with undigested reforms, and keeping the world in a state of chaos. And what is it when all told? A fortune that a man will not spend, a little fame that the next puff of wind blows away, or

a few souls taken out of their groove, clipped, bound, fashioned into an unnatural form—saved, I believe your churchmen call it. My God! is heaven to be filled with such poor, maimed, and shackled bodies?"

"I am not even *that* generous," gloomily. "It is for myself."

"Well, what can a man have but food and raiment? So little suffices him, if he would but believe it."

"If it is what he wants."

"And you want—too much. Pah! Is the whole thing worth the trouble? You make a fortune, and the men who would have kicked you yesterday, smile on you to-day. You woo a mistress, and while your kisses are dewy wet on her lips, another revels in the fragrance. Has the wine a bitter flavor?"

"It is not fortune, it is not love, but only a place in the world, where I should fit without all this friction."

"A man fits out here—in the free air. The trees tell him no lies, his couch of moss is thornless. Does not a day like this make amends for all? A little merriment and good cheer, a long holiday under clear skies, the twitter of birds, the cool voice of the stream. And to-morrow a new sunrise, a new day, the evil sufficient for the hours. Why drag them into this?"

Victor listened in dim amaze. If all the world took up this vagrant, gipsy life—

"The creed is too broad for you!" with a rippling, flute-like laugh. "You have gained yours in the city yonder, where a man's brawn and brain is weighed against so much gold. Society says, 'Marry, become a good and useful citizen of the state:' greed says, 'If this man see starvation written in his wife's faded eyes, and every line of his children's meagre frames, he will go down into the festering mass and sweat drops of gold for us. Give him wife and children. And so the pool is always full. Are you going down into it?"

"I am *not* going down into it, so help me God!" shutting his lips with a pressure that turned their scarlet into blue, their laughter into pain.

"A man is his own God in these matters;" shrugging his shoulders with a dainty grace.

"Then you do not believe—"

"In a God? Yes. In a clean, pure God, in a God that speaks to the souls of men through His clear, sweet voices. Does not the bird call to matin song when he praises the Lord for his glad, joyous life? Does not the forest utter speech of Him, the waters murmur His name as they glide onward to the sea? Do you need that vile, struggling crowd down yonder, where the mothers beat their squalid children, and the husbands murder their wives in drunken fury, to convince you of *His* existence? Ah, well, I think it would make me disbelieve."

The eyes were no longer dreamy but sparkling with scorn, disgust; and the flexible lip curled as if it shrank from some taint in the air.

The contrast came to Victor in an absolutely grotesque fashion. His father on the one side going down to the depths for these lost, polluted souls; and this man leaving them to die in their own corruption, passing them by and holding his slender fingers in the fragrant air that even the imaginary taint might be blown away. Was this the medicine he needed for his soul?

"Pah! Let it all go. Look at yonder slant of sunshine. And yet, poor human eyes that see no beauty in that, rave about a painted picture. The world is awry, my fine fellow!"

Victor glanced straight onward. The river broadened here, and through an irregular defile the westward sun poured in, soft with the purpling haze of mountain-tops. Long rays of floating, capricious vapor, tinted with gold and crimson, entangling the confused crests and ridges of the dark hills, or couching in amethystine masses like a fairy troupe at the

mouth of shadowy caves. And beyond, the clouds in the northern sky gathering themselves into white towers and fortresses, behind whose battlements the forces of the falling night watched the rosy flocks disperse, for the glory of day was coming slowly to an end.

Latour tuned his violin and they glided on in silence. Not a footstep to startle them or the familiar birds, not a human face to peer at them curiously. It seemed to Victor as if they were in some far solitude.

But presently one side of the river grew more open. Vast tracts of yellow stubble, clover-grown in some places, the ripening corn nodding its yellow-tasselled head, signs of life in the quaint idle mill, the ducks paddling at the edge of the stream busy with droning gossip, the orchards heavy with fruit, and the infrequent houses.

"Let me relieve you!"

But Victor would not, though his arms ached and his hands were blistered.

And then the twilight dropped over them, the sun being hidden by the chain of mountains. Both were silent, and both were studying each other; but with one it was the inexperience of youth, the other with the careless half-satire, half-sympathy of five and thirty years, spent in rambling from clime to clime, and laughing occasionally at human nature under its thin disguises.

"At Bohemia," he said, starting a little. "To-morrow the toil is mine, remember."

And Victor Hurst saw the quaint settlement before him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE barley sheaves were stacked, and the long-bearded heads glistened goldenly in the light of the young moon. The field had been gleaned and the summer harvesting was done. Great low-browed barns filled with fragrant hay, oats, rye, wheat, safely housed; cattle lowing in their wide yards, and busy figures running to and fro, with an unmusical confusion of sound.

A quaint scene, indeed. You find northern and western Pennsylvania dotted with these odd settlements, where old-world customs are intact—where dress, language, and all the minutiæ are still unchanged. These women, in their coarse, heavy shoes, their scant skirts and gay festival short-gowns, gave no heed to the fashions of the world without. Sun-browned were they, square of shoulder and heavy of limb, large-handed and with short, squat fingers, looking as if they might have been amputated at the first joint.

Not beautiful, certainly. Ground down to the last morsel of mouldy black bread for generations, with but an occasional whiff of garlic or a handful of lentils, and no break in the toil, would you expect fine souls and large brains, clear skins and soft, expressive eyes? As the world rolls on, their birthright, out of which they have been cheated, may come back to them; for,

"The world goes up and the world goes down."

Yet, in their way, they are happy. No perplexing social problems, no effort at grandeur, no fretting at the narrow groove in which they run smoothly from midsummer to midsummer, with marriages, births, christenings, and harvests, and the infrequent funeral.

The cottages were low and plain, but the soft moonlight gave them a certain picturesqueness. On the smooth green-sward stood the long table, draped with the holiday-cloth, rarely seen, save at a festival.

No black bread now, and yet as little of what the world calls luxury. No piles of luscious viands, jellies, ices, creams; but wholesome fruits, golden-hearted cake, snowy bread in bountiful slices, great hams ready to carve, cheese yellow and soft, and some old-country concoctions, that, after all, were not distasteful, even to cultivated palates. And the healthy, heartsome faces, the clear, strong voices, had in them a touch of the high hills and broad meadows, the ring of satisfied toil; not the thin, sharp tone of a starved body and overfed brain.

Paul was as one of them. He knew their language even to the broad patois, and understood their ways, their jests, and laughter. He played the old songs of Fatherland for them, and joined in the ringing chorus. And yet how different! Victor smiled inwardly.

"Is it dull, comrade?"

"Dull? No. It's a strange picture to me, and I feel as if I had wandered beyond the seas. But I like it."

"They are going to dance;" with a light smile. "Come and join them."

"I?" Victor drew back with the old boyish blush.

"Yes. These people do not study the grace or poetry of motion. The women dance as they cut their grain, by the hardest!"

"Let me watch them here."

"There are some passable girls. Hark! what is that? Audience for my fair friends!"

A great lumbering wagon stopped, and amid much talk and laughter, a gay crowd was handed out.

"The fame of the festival has spread through the land. I believe there is a hotel or something up the mountain, and their own pleasures will not suffice."

Twelve or fifteen trooped out of the crowded wagon. Two among them finished their merriment first, and stood silent, as if feeling hardly at home; a girl and a youth, brother and sister Victor thought them at first.

And yet their faces were most unlike. She, a mere slip of fifteen or thereabouts, petite, slender, with soft curling hair that fell like a cloud to her waist, a fine, clear complexion, and lovely blue eyes. A rosy, dainty picture, different from anything he had ever seen.

The other was slight as well, with the light hair and blonde characteristics; but instead of the clear straightforward outlook of the girl, his was weak, vascillating, selfish, and crafty. Not a face to trust, Victor decided.

The dancing began. At first, the spectators laughed a little, then a few of the more venturesome joined—two or three madcap girls ripe for a frolic, and as many young men. They flavored it with the grace and elegance of cultivation. Faster thrilled out the glowing sweetness and daring of the violin, until all the summer-night air seemed to throb with sentiency. If some kept time with brain and soul, and others with mere slow, physical enjoyment, what matter?

The hosts were courteous with overflowing German hospitality, and the guests fraternized speedily. Here a couple strayed off to the veiling shadow of a great tree, shy even of the tender moonlight so akin to the romance stirring in their hearts, albeit a little dully according to their slow natures.

Even Victor's bashful mood was thawed by the general gay good-humor. Paul dragged him here and there; his hand was grasped in a strong, heartsome welcome, and he translated the strange tongue by the smiles and beaming eyes.

Presently he found himself in the vicinity of the girl he had been unconsciously watching, or rather she came and threw herself with the sweet abandon of fearless youth on the rude bench beside him, and laughed out her apology in German; but, oh, the music! Could it be akin to these coarse tongues?

"I am—not a German," stammering and blushing.

"Oh!" looking sharply at the hair of bronze, and ruddy skin. "Then you don't belong to the settlement?" in an impulsive tone.

"No. I came down the river with—with Latour."

"Isn't he the musician? They call him Paul."

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"It is a grand old name," in a meditative way. "Yes, I like it. I like all names that seem to mean something."

He smiled at her earnestness.

"And on the same principle, I always find fault with mine. Sylvia Redmond. It carries no weight. It has no character!"

She was a charming picture of pretty, pettish dissatisfaction.

"Yes," he made answer. "Names ought to be the key-note. But one can tell so little about a child."

She was a trifle vexed that he did not compliment hers. There were a good many small coquetries in her heart of fifteen, but they were very sweet withal.

"How far down the river did you come?"

"A dozen miles. But I left Weareham this morning."

"Oh, that's a great town!" looking oddly at him. "And you are a friend of Paul Latour's. Tell me something about him. It is a curious dark face; Italian, I think, though the name is French."

"I have been acquainted with him since noon, only."

She stared with a pretty, piquant grace, and laughed in short, musical notes.

"It is an adventure," she said, with gleeful heedlessness. "Mr. Gilliat tells me about them sometimes—incidents of his tours abroad."

"Your brother?" Victor returned nervously. "The fair youth by whom you stood so long when you first left the wagon?"

"You saw us then?" pleased with the confessed notice.

"But he is not my brother—I have none. It is Eustace Gilliat."

Her announcement did not in the least seem to astonish this stranger. Yet she had seen people wonderfully gratified by the knowledge.

"I am glad he is not your brother;" in a strange, relieved tone.

"Why? Perhaps you don't know—" in her winning, childish eagerness. "It is such a grand old family. I like to look over the old genealogy. There have been earls and dukes, and a Sir Hugh Gilliat, who was a great royalist in the time of Charles the First, and a brave soldier. And Madame Gilliat came from royalty. They were cousins—Eustace's parents. And the house is like a palace! Do you know, I sometimes wish that I could be Eustace Gilliat!"

"Better a thousand times be yourself," a curious heat and passion flushing his face and adding a touch of hoarse strength to his voice.

"Mamma came of the Randolphs in Virginia. I'm proud of that, though maybe it is not quite so grand as the Gilliat descent," meditatively. "I like this idea of pure old blood, that has never been brought in contact with vulgarity or ignorance, but kept clean and fine. I think it always speaks in a person."

A born aristocrat, dainty, refined, and no doubt exclusive, when the lines came to be sharply drawn. Well, why should he care if her clean, pure lines barred him without? Why should every nerve rise up in bristling resistance to her foolish child's gossip?

"And so," he began almost harshly, "you are desirous of taking that shallow, flavorless life in exchange for your brightness!"

"Shallow! What do you mean?" in a sudden heat.

"What I said;" doggedly. "There's not a strong line in his face, there's not a bit of energy in that girlish figure, and

if the old blood ever was rich and strong, it became diluted before it reached his veins."

She gazed at her companion with an odd mixture of terror, surprise, and offended dignity, blended with the interest that, after all, overrules youth and renders it daring, incautious.

"He is very young, just past nineteen; and then he has lived abroad so much. Mr. Gilliat, you know, had a government appointment four years, and he has seen—everything—is accomplished, and all that. Mamma likes him so much!"

"And you?"

Some deep interest urged him on, not mere morbid curiosity. He had never talked so freely to any one in his life—quite as if he had a right. And she did not resent it, as a girl with more pride or experience would have done. The Randolph blood could not have made much headway in her veins.

"He amuses and entertains me;" rather pettishly. "And he knows all about Paris and Baden-Baden, and it's like a novel to hear him talk. But when he comes to a man's life—"

"Yes, when he comes to a man's life," with a touch of excitement in his voice, and his eyes growing darker, dimmer.

"It will be different, I suppose. If you could see Mr. Gilliat! He always seems like a story-book hero to me, so grand, so courteous, so learned; and as Eustace grows older he will be more like his father."

"Does that follow?" grimly, twisting the button on his gray blouse.

"I think—it ought. But that wasn't quite what I meant when I wished to be in his place. It is a great thing to have power, and wealth, and knowledge; to be able to wrest the secrets out of the earth and the air, to know why governments fail or succeed, and why nations perish. I listen to them often when they are talking in the great drawing-room at Rothermel, and it seems of so much more importance to be a man, and

not have your head full of silly trifles—dresses, and laces, and parties. But how can we help it?"

She looked so entirely sweet and beguiling, that Victor Hurst, foolish fellow, thought the world would sustain an irreparable loss if in this case sex were reversed.

"Every man has a right to know this much!" with a fierce, rapid underbreath that half strangled him in his abrupt transition of thought. "And when he is crowded out of his place by some cruel, unjust fate, the world cannot blame him if he makes a hard fight and deals blows right and left!"

She looked at him in dim amaze. This was not quite the creed of the gentlemen in the Gilliat drawing-room. Their heroes and high souls were born to the position, and did not have to fight their way up. Hard blows were connected, in her mind, with the lower classes, poverty, degradation, and their kindred.

He saw the surprise in her soft eyes, and it fretted him, for he had fancied a moment ago that there was a delicate bridge between them over which one might pass to the better knowledge of the other. And not understanding social problems clearly, he was the more ready to parade his weapons for the fray.

"It seems to me that a man has a right to bring himself up to any height that he can reach, no matter if he came out of the sloughs of the street! If the fine, earnest soul is in him."

"But I think it never is in such people," venturing to fill his pause. "The coarse, degraded lives, the common and menial occupations, the low pleasures, and the lack of education unfits them for any sphere save their own. They would not be happy out of it."

She had heard all this so often that it was like a lesson learned by rote. She looked so graceful and dainty here in the soft moonlight, the fine, pure complexion, the silken hair, the almost haughty mouth and chin, the delicate child's hand, slender and white, and all the elegant touches of dress, from

her bronze boot, restlessly crunching the grass, to the bit of lace against her shapely, swelling throat. It affected him curiously. His soul was full of awkward, rugged honesty, and he would not win one word from her under a false pretence.

"I think they could be happy elsewhere if they had a chance. Many of them *are* able to understand the advantages of education: they work for it, fight for it, starve for it. Would your rich men's sons do this? And if any soul *can* lift itself up to the purer, higher level, what right have you and your class to crowd him out?"

"I shouldn't crowd anybody out," falteringly.

"But you would tread upon him, crush him, as if he were a worm who had dared to rear his head."

"Not such as you," she made answer, involuntarily, noting the strong resolute eyes, and the fine lips he was compressing in the heat of passion. It did not occur to her then that gentlemen of the Gilliat school never carried their tempers so plainly in their faces.

"Why, I belong to the class you think incapable of redemption!" with a short, bitter laugh. "But maybe I can feel the most plainly what is stirring in my own soul. Yours set bounds for it, but now and then one daring spirit flashes out of the orbit made by men's hands. Victor Hurst means to do this."

She possessed a sweet, generous nature, and it was so used to daily crossings, and thwartings, and ridicule, that she was not angry now, as any other girl might have been. Indeed, her habit of catching at any new idea, and following stray whims, stood her in good stead.

"Victor," she said, softly, "somewhere along your line there must have been a king. It is a king's name."

"There have been no kings," brusquely. "My father is a plain, commonplace man; my mother—well, she could have been a lady with the best of you. The small accident of birth or wealth shut her out. I mean to overleap it."

His voice rang out with a sharp, electric force, and obeying some sudden impulse, he rose and stood before her.

He was thinking of the far future, so bright with youthful ambition, so possible as he felt the warm, vigorous blood rushing through his veins in great, tumultuous bounds. He *would* win something. He would stand before her and her class one day, and say, proudly, "I am Victor Hurst. What is the praise of your fragrant lips to me, when I remember that last year they laughed me to scorn!"

She glanced at him as he towered before her, in the moonlight. Tall, arrowy-straight, haughty enough in this mood to match the finest of her every-day princes, the fiery eyes sweeping the space between, and challenging her soul, as if it would cleave an entrance therein; the flexible nostrils panting with inward heat, like a thorough-bred waiting impatiently for the signal. A sense of awe and mystery crept over her; a consciousness of a peculiar kind of power which had never before bearded her in this fashion.

The music had ceased moments ago. The crowd was surging to the long table, improved by the magical touch of excitement, pleasure. Heavy eyes had brightened, dull lips were scarlet and smiling, and the very air appeared full of chatter and vivacity. The clatter of strange tongues, the quaint dresses, the animation, gave the scene a peculiarly foreign appearance. To Victor it was like a glimpse of a far country.

Miss Redmond's party were coming in search of her. Victor drew back in the shadow of a great oak, his courage vanished into diffidence. He saw so clearly, now, the gulf that divided them. These women, in gay attire, and the haughty air of superiority, their faces full of a kind of pleasant contempt, as if, after all, they would not grudge these poor fools their enjoyment, as it would even afford them something to laugh about to-morrow.

And yet they came to the simple feast. Just for the sake of criticising the homely fare, and distorting their faces a little

with the Rhine wine. No breach of hospitality therein, since there could be no social equality.

Paul Latour laughed and jested with rare good-humor, remembering festivals among other mountains. The young men crowded to his vicinity—awkward clowns, perhaps, but he did not smile over their lack of polish. So they ate, drank, and feasted with soul as well as body, breaking presently into wild German choruses that made the woods ring out a thousand echoes.

After this, the staid matrons began to gather their dishes and pile up the fragments. The younger ones entreated Paul for some more music, and formed themselves into a ring on the greensward. Victor strolled away in a curious mood of unrest, for Sylvia's duenna seemed suddenly to have awakened to her sense of duty, keeping the girl close to her.

Down by the river's edge, where the noiseless breath of night wafted fleets of damp, fragrant odors, like a shadowy army. Thinking of these dull, uneventful lives with their slow, brooding content: of those out yonder, rendered fine and keen by the flow of gold, wishes gratified, desires fulfilled, art, and science, and culture at their feet, drifted up by the plenteous sea. And he, neither dully content, nor having the means to compass any vague dream.

What was that? A half-smothered cry, not one of pleasure altogether, it seemed, then a voice of entreaty, a cruel, mocking laugh, a triumphant jest of some kind, as he could tell by the tone. The chivalrous blood stirred within him, and yet he paused until the cry was repeated, but this time more faintly.

Then he sprang forward. One of the young girls of the "settlement," he could tell by her dress; and the other—some instinctive knowledge warned him that it was Eustace Gilliat. No sweet stolen kisses were these, but ravished from lips that cried out in stifled, impotent helplessness.

"Villain! Thief!" and the next instant he had the slight form cowering in his giant's grasp.

"So that is your translation of hospitality! Go, child, go;" to the girl, who, sobbing and gesticulating, kissed his disengaged hand with frantic fervor, and vanished like a fawn.

"You deserve to be thrown into the river yonder, base coward that you are! A defenceless child, too! I heard her cry of affright."

"Sneak and spy that *you* are!" was the insolent rejoinder. "As if the little fool's resistance meant anything!" and he struggled in the grasp that was not relaxed a trifle. "Do you know that I am Eustace Gilliat? Unhand me, you low vagabond!"

It would be an easy thing to fling him over into the current like so much carrion. A mean, arrogant, blustering coward, rose-scented without, but vile within! The son of a rich man, heir to a fortune, revelling in luxury and perhaps grossness, a pale, effeminate, beardless youth, with hardly a woman's strength in his puny arms. He had seen Paris with its wonders!

It all passed through Victor's brain like a flash. One of those curious presentiments as well. He felt that he had made an enemy, and that sometime the bitter blood between them would have to be fought out to the last drop.

"Let me go, I say, or by heaven you shall rue it! Is there no help at hand that a man must be murdered in cold blood by a ruffian for having kissed a pretty girl, who after all was willing enough, as such creatures usually are! It was Burgundy to her after her sour Rhine."

"I shall not murder you," with a scornful laugh, "though I could do it easily. Neither do I spare you because you are a rich man's son. You have outraged the commonest law of hospitality, and lied, basely. This is some of your pure old blood!"

The sneer stung Gilliat, and the mortification of still being a prisoner made him tremble with rage. He gave a sudden wrench and aimed a backward blow at his adversary, but it went wide of its aim.

"Take that, in memory of your insult to a defenceless girl, and go;" loosening his hold of Gilliat with so sudden a force that the youth stumbled. And there in his face was the red flush left by the other's hand.

Eustace Gilliat arose livid with passion, and confronted the supple giant standing unmoved before him. To venture a blow would be the simplest folly.

"A Gilliat never forgives an insult, never! You will hear of this again;" a look of baffled hatred gleaming from his eyes.

"Very well. The girl possibly can tell her own story. It will be two against one, but if your high-born Gilliat blood thirsts for the notoriety—" with another stinging laugh.

Eustace Gilliat walked away in ignominious, impotent silence, the rage of a narrow, selfish nature that could brook no control. If look could have murdered, his surely would have done so.

Victor felt quite light of heart. He had struck the blow against the class of aristocrats, as well as the particular individual. The secret antagonism had raised its voice in protest, and now he meant to fight his way through.

Ah, Victor, youth has many battles on this rough ground, where neither can see his adversary clearly, and there is a good deal of useless fighting with shadows.

Long before midnight Bohmerwald had sunk into the silence of peaceful slumber. Paul and Victor shared a great room whose uncarpeted floor was silvery white, and whose single pallets were fragrant with sweet herbs.

CHAPTER VII.

By dawn the little village was again astir, but there was no bright flutter of holiday caps and gowns. The clear, shrill ring of the cocks from wayside eminences, the lowing of kine, and the faint bleating of the distant sheep, mingled with the cheerful but uncadenced voices of men and women, taking up their homely life.

And they were content, Victor thought, gazing idly out over the lovely landscape in its rosy, morning haze. No rank, nervous vitality to be rubbed sharply against the plodding details, until it was all one keen, aching sore. Was it because they knew no better? Their simple-hearted Lutheran priest had religion enough for them; their ambition went no farther than their farm fences.

Did God make them all of one clay, and breathe into every soul the breath of life? These in their cleanly quiet, and the hosts of wretches out city-ward, who turned night into a vile orgie, beat their wives and children, filled the festering prisons and paupers' graves? And the delicate souls pampered in luxury until weakness became their only grace: the restless souls like his, finding no place where they could work in their full, exultant strength—not of brawn, but brain.

Paul Latour startled him by a fling of laughter, though the sun had flooded the room for nearly an hour.

"You take life too hard, comrade! I said it yesterday."

"Yes," twisting his fingers nervously. "But life *is* a strange, hard matter with me."

"And why should it be? Ask the birds for their secret. A crumb, a nest, and a song. A twittering among the leaves in the morning, a cheery whistle at night. Here to-day, to-

morrow in the grave, mayhap! What does it matter? Tra, la, la, la."

Victor smiled oddly. Yesterday, the magnetic voice had fascinated him. The luminous eyes, the olive skin, and stragling gipsy beard, and the inconsequent trifles of talk were so many charms.

To-day he wanted strength; the positive instead of the negative. And work of the right kind, when it came to that.

"Come," Latour said gayly, "cast care to the winds. Let us follow the breeze which warms and ripens all within its reach. Our empire shall be the whole world, field, forest, sea, or desert. We will sun ourselves amid Spanish vineyards, where the grapes lie purpling into sweeter wine than we drank last night, and eat our fruit where the laughing waves dash music in our very faces. Or, if you like Italian skies better, there are groves of olives and figs. We shall not starve. And for amusement or greed, I will fiddle to villagers as I did last night. For see, I like you!".

The odd, piquant, earnest manner moved Victor, and above all, the naive confession.

"Thank you. But it would be quite impossible."

"Yet you sigh for freedom?"

"And I should tire of idleness after awhile."

"Paf! You might paint a picture!"

Victor flushed and thrilled with secret joy. Why not the desultory Bohemian life of art and music? He loved both. And the vision tempted him.

He reached over for his knapsack with eager, trembling hands.

"I don't know about painting. It is either a genius or a life-long study. I could never translate the color of this morning, or the softness of last night. But I have done these."

Some small pencil-studies, defined with marvellous accuracy, and two or three half-finished.

"If they could be done in black and white! But color—"

"You can study over there;" nodding his head eastward. "And there a bunch of grapes and a crust suffices. What do we care for palaces while the stars shine and peasants keep the ground warm with their dancing? Yes, come."

The voice fell into soft, pleading accords, and the quaint face had the eagerness of a child's.

They were summoned to breakfast. Their hostess had spread a small table with delicacies, and welcomed them with the cordiality of a mother.

Brown and bent, the grizzled hair gathered under the high starched cap, the skin dried and wrinkled; but the smile frank and joyous, the eyes keen, yet kind.

By the open window opposite, sat a young girl knotting some coarse white fringe. She glanced up, blushed, and trembled; then with a sudden rush joined the group, clasping her mother's horny hands, and talking rapidly. Paul and the mother turned their eyes toward Victor, the latter breaking into voluble exclamations.

"So, comrade!" and Paul's hand was laid upon his shoulder. "You made true your claim to the guild. Marie says, that last night you rescued her from the freedom of an insolent scamp, and she is all gratitude. How modest you were!"

"It was nothing," and Victor flushed. He had not recognized the girl at first, but her voice and gestures were familiar after a moment.

Paul interpreted. Marie, it seems, had danced once with the young gallant, and then been drawn into walking with him, when his friendliness had degenerated into coarse, ungentlemanly license. Marie magnified her deliverer's office, and was profuse in her gratitude.

"They are boors, these rich men's sons," exclaimed Paul, angrily. "They have their balls, and dinners, and dissipations —why could they not stay away, or behave honorably! Pah! I am only sorry that you did not throw him into the river!"

Victor laughed gayly. He was good-humored this morning, and not morbid ; besides, Paul would hardly understand the smouldering class-quarrel that he had with the Gilliat blood.

They ate their breakfast and rambled round the settlement, where so many things were new to Victor's eyes. And the friends, for such they were, fell into a half-confidence, and a promise that when May came, the two would journey together as free companions.

Victor threaded his way over the mountains that night alone. Three days since Monday morning, and in them he seemed to have lived half a lifetime. But he was coming back to civilization, where the air was full of strangling smoke and vile odors, and then he balanced liberty in the one hand and honor in the other, and thought he had lost. If he could have cried through the trees for Paul !

His mother sat by the window watching, and knew the step long before it sounded on the old garden-path. She snuffed her dim candle, wiped the tears from her eyes, and went out to meet him.

"Victor !" with a great tremble in her voice, a great throb of joy at her weary heart.

He knew what fear had been chilling along the pulses like a keen, wintry blast, making the hands ice-cold even now.

"I told you that I would come back," not unkindly.

"But it was so late."

"Am I a baby that I must be housed at dark ?"

"Victor !" with a fond lingering over the name, a clinging of hands and a tremulous flutter of the weary eyelids. Ah, poor mother ! Sons who do not go up to Calvary, still say—"Woman, what have I to do with thee !"

He looked for his father to be in the arm-chair, stern, questioning, ready to censure, but the corner was vacant, so he softened a little.

"I have had a rare holiday indeed !—a journey to the Bo-

hemian settlement, miles down the river. They had a harvest festival last night."

"I am glad you were happy."

With her there had been nothing but dead people and funerals. The seven works of Mercy was her rosary, and she told the beads over often.

"Yes, I am glad that you have been happy;" in a motherly, wandering way, the eyes still sad and wistful.

He looked so handsome, his face all aflush, and his tawny hair thrown back, the lithe rounded limbs just defined under the gray blouse, compact, nervous, strong.

If he had sat down and told her of the festival, the joys and pleasures of the simple folk, and most of all, particularized his own, it would have rendered her so happy. The warm, vital interest between her child and herself grew less every day. She saw it with pain.

"Good-night. Is father home?"

"He went to bed an hour ago, very tired. I think he grows feebler this warm weather;" sighing wearily.

"Carrying the burden of all those miserable lives upon his soul! I don't believe God requires it."

"He is anxious for you, too;" timidly.

"He may lay down that care! I shall never be saved in his way, never. There! I have hurt you! But—good-night, again. You were kind to sit up for me."

In his own room he pulled out the dry bread and withered grapes, laughing a little.

"It's not so bad after all. And to see the world—all those rare old lands, the groves of orange and palm, the long glistening vineyards, the palaces and galleries, to study a little and to know life, life! Next May. I wonder if the waiting will seem long?" and he sighed softly, for—

> "A boy's will is the winds' will,
> And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

Through his dreamy brain floated Paul, Sylvia Redmond,

and Eustace Gilliat. The last he hated with a kind of bitter contempt. Sylvia would marry him, of course, she was so permeated with admiration of lofty descent. A foolish little thing, and yet he half envied the wealth that would fall into her hands, golden, ripe fruit.

John Hurst had been deeply shocked at his son's dereliction, and perhaps a little offended that his mother had silently abetted it. To go off pleasuring when so good an old man as Mr. Norcross lay dead, and all the shop-hands were expected to show their sympathy and respect, seemed to him absolutely heartless. For he believed devoutly in the lesser command of ordering one's self lowly and reverently to one's betters. The old-fashioned faith of his boyhood would never be eradicated.

"The lad strays farther and farther," he said sharply. "He has no fear of present displeasure, nor the judgment to come. We have failed in our duty, and God sends us this bitter, wild fruit by way of punishment."

"I don't know," she made answer in her tender, motherly way. "We were not all wise at twenty;" and she sighed.

"But he has had good counsel and many prayers, much patience. It will be the story of the child Absalom over again!"

She shivered, crying out with sharp pain—

"You judge too soon! Perhaps the mistake may have been ours. He has a peculiar nature—"

"The old excuse for sin and wilfulness. What will it avail with God, think you? There is but one law, one way."

A hard faith, truly. Was it *her* carnal heart that rose in bitterness? And somehow every pulse within her mutinied, gave a quick throb of resistant anguish. Had she sinned so sorely then, that she must be bitterly punished now? To whom should she turn—to God, or to her son?

So she had gone patiently about her household cares and her works of mercy. These poor women clung to her, perhaps

because she had so few texts and so many tears. She listened to her husband's earnest warning over the grave of the poor laborer, hurried out of the world, at his post of duty, by the careless and narrow economy of his fellow-man, who builded a frail scaffolding; and then she turned to the Reverend Underwood's glowing discourse of the dead saint lying below the pulpit in all the delicate state of rosewood and satin. A good man, a just man, a generous almoner, a bulwark of the state, society, virtue, a man whose death would be felt everywhere, over whom the grateful heathen would weep, and Christians sorrow, but not without hope.

Ah, had he ever stamped in the snow to warm his chilled and weary feet, and crawled under a stoop, or in some empty ash-box to sleep; had he felt the wind blow through tattered garments, shaving the tender skin with an edge as keen as a razor; had he looked with hungry, longing eyes at the bread in the shop-windows, and feasted on the smell steaming out from some grand kitchen—shadowy supper indeed! No! his had been the purple and the fine linen—and yet men praised him for not having been a villain.

Anah Hurst's brain was confused with it all. Could God see how easy it was to be good there, how hard here; and how much more faith it takes to starve by inches, being honest, than to be cast to wild beasts at Ephesus?

She crept softly up to her room, took off the plain gray dress with its linen collar, and hung it carefully on the peg. And the picture came oddly into her mind of having seen Mrs. Underwood among the mourners, in her rich black-silk and point-lace, and the clusters of purple heliotrope and pansy in her elegant lace bonnet. Not that only. Sons and daughters were around her—bright, rosy children—maybe this very evening she went and kissed them as they lay in their beds. It seemed as if all prosperous women were happy. So much gold stood for so much comfort, and ease, and bliss. If she had been rich she could have given her boy that which he

most wanted, all the appliances of knowledge. And if he had not been fretted on every side, repressed, clipped to fit a certain mould—*was* it God's express wish? Did he mean that poor people only should save their souls through much tribulation, much pain and self-sacrifice, and that the others should go to heaven on "flowery beds of ease?"

She was so tired, now, that judgment and piety had gone astray, and in the dark were taking each other for sharp foes. And kneeling there by her bed she prayed in a sort of breathless hush—not for the poor women who dropped their babies into the Ganges, but the one nearer home, whose son was drifting out—out—somewhere beyond a mother's arms, and thinking of the one who, in His great agony, prayed for Himself.

On Thursday morning Victor Hurst went back to his distasteful employment with a peculiar energy and content. Less than a year of it, and he had so much to do besides. For he was ignorant of everything. The rigid fears and scruples that had shut out the world of literature, left his mind a kind of blank, troubled sea. What did he know of the old heroes, and warriors, and poets, whose names were common food to Paul Latour's lips? And if he went to the country of their birth or their wanderings, he must learn a little of their lives.

The household went on in its olden groove. John Hurst laboring among the poor and miserable, trying to fit creeds and beliefs into minds turned awry by many a cruel wrench; receiving a meagre pittance, and bestowing half of that in alms, taking his share of meat out to some starving laborer, his soft white bread to the sickly, famished baby. If he was sometimes a little hungered, he said to himself that fasting was good for the soul, made it more earnest and fervent in prayer.

But the fire always burned cheerfully on the hearth, with a great, ruddy, rollicking blaze. Victor used to turn from his pile of books, and study its emerald and violet heats, and the sturdier scarlet flashes that writhed up the dusky background like

some tortured living thing. All sights and sounds came to have a new meaning for him ; an under-current of subtle translation from the material to the intellectual. What a dull clod he had been last year: what a poor, weak fool farther back, when he had a hankering for the rough merriment of tavern steps, and low songs, with a coarse banjo accompaniment! And yet it was simply a boy's love for amusement, companionship.

Anah Hurst sat on the opposite side of the broad chimney, and sewed. Garments for the poor, sometimes the cast-off clothes of richer neighbors, but as often the product of her own small economies.

The distance between Victor Hurst and his parents grew more sharply defined. John Hurst had made one protest against infidel books being brought into the house.

"Very well," was Victor's curt, incisive answer. "Where my books go, I go. I dare say I can find friendly shelter in town. And as for infidelity—go look through the library of your clerical brethren ; you will find them all there."

So Victor and his books remained. His mother used to watch him out of her soft, sad eyes. She made no attempts to draw him nearer to herself: let her get used to the separation by degrees. And he never saw the lines settling in her face, the slight depression about the mouth, the delicate skin coming to have a gray, wan look. He had a right to make the best he could out of his own life.

And so it came to April—four weeks, only, to May—a few days between him and freedom.

"Norcross wants to see you in the office, to-night," Baxter announced to him one afternoon.

He merely nodded. After six he washed his hands and face, and combed his tumbled hair, the water drenching it with bright amber tints.

There, in his arm-chair covered with Russia leather, sat the great man. Ruddy, prosperous, satisfied.

"Ah, Hurst!" glancing up at the tall fellow. "I sent for

you, to say," tumbling over some papers to give the matter a more important air, "that—but I suppose you have counted the days—your time is up on next Wednesday."

"Yes." Very grave and quietly, as if he might be an equal.

Norcross stared a little.

"What I have to say, young man," in a sort of pompous, patronizing manner, "is, that I have heard a fair account of you from Baxter;—a good, skilful workman, steady and sober; for of late the vice of drinking has increased terribly among your class. I am very glad for your father's sake. Your father is an excellent man, Hurst. I hear noble stories of him everywhere."

"My father does right according to his belief."

"And religion is a good thing. I wish we had more of it in the world."

"You would not want his," with a bitter smile. "It is comprised in two words—labor and sacrifice."

The ruddy face was a trifle ruddier, as if some sarcasm underlaid the words.

"It is a bad sign when young men sneer at religion, the great substratum of society and morality," in a rather sharp, dogmatic tone.

Victor was silent.

"And I was about to say, that next Wednesday you may consider yourself engaged at the highest journeyman's wages. We are pretty full of orders, now, and I never let a good workman go if I can help it. Baxter learned his trade here. I always give my boys the first offer."

"I am obliged, Mr. Norcross, but I shall not stay."

"Not stay, eh! What's up? Why, Baxter said you had been steady as an old clock the past ten months, and that you had never been given to beer or fooling. Where are you going? If wages is the object—"

"No," still calmly. "I do not mean to work at my trade."

"Why?" in a tone of surprise.

"I do not like it," as if he was shaking off some repulsive object. "I never have. I came to it against my will."

"Doubtless your father knew what was best for you," with an air of superiority. "A trade is a good thing for a man, and there's nothing like it to steady a boy through his most dangerous years."

"I've passed the danger, then," with a rather ungracious laugh.

"What do you expect to do—turn doctor, or lawyer, or travelling artist?"

"That is my affair," with a touch of the old doggedness, since the words cut rather close.

"Hurst, you are a fool!" with a slow shake of the head. "There is too much of this romantic dissatisfaction in the world. You have a good trade, a chance of steady employment year in and year out, and the best thing for you to do is to marry a healthy, happy girl in your own station, and lead a useful, industrious life. If more men did this, it would be better for the world in general. We have too much of this maudlin, sickly philosophy already."

"A man has a right to do what he likes with himself, I suppose?"

"Well, no, I should say not. You men who claim a right to starve are the last ones to do it, I observe. And then you become chargeable to society in the shape of paupers and criminals."

"I am not afraid of that."

It entered oddly enough into the mind of Norcross that he looked like a king standing there, in his tawny crown, his resolute eyes, the indescribable air that in a rich man's son would have been high breeding, and the symmetrical figure. And then wandered in a stray sentence of Baxter's—

"His father had some trouble with him at first, but he is a fine fellow now."

Why should he spoil a useful life for a vague idea?

"I dare say you have been writing for the magazines," with a sneer. Geniuses seem to abound in the common walks of life, now-a-days."

"I have not. That is all, I believe, Mr. Norcross. Next Wednesday I will take my freedom, and you will never hear of my becoming chargeable to Weareham."

With that he bowed loftily, though his heart swelled within him, and went out into the balmy spring twilight. It was so cool and fresh, with a fragrance of the south in it, that seemed to overbear the smoke, and grease, and disagreeable smells.

"They are all of *her* kind," he muttered. "A poor man is nothing but a machine, and they are always in haste to freight him with wife and babies to drag him down!"

For it seemed to him in young manhood that women were but weights and clogs, and love a sham. That was a part of Paul Latour's philosophy.

"Aha, Comrade!"

Victor started in surprise. Paul himself, looking slighter, and smaller, and darker than ever, with his violin case in his hand.

"It is May!" with the lightsome carol of a bird in his voice. "And you are ready for freedom! Paf! How do you live in this vile town? Cologne is as nothing to it. My nostrils are filled with varnish, and dyes, and smoke, and my skin has a crocodile's scale of cinders!"

"It is unlike the woods. Then you have not forgotten me?" with a secret thrill of joy.

"Forgotten you? Did I not promise?"

Victor clasped the warm hand. Latterly Paul Latour and the Bohmerwald festival had appeared exceedingly dream-like to him.

"My friend, are you free? Answer me that," in a tone of childish eagerness.

"No, not until next week. And the winter has passed rapidly. I have been learning to love your old poets;" with a kindling eye and tender smile.

"Ah, I knew you would. When I want mirth, or sadness, or tragedy, I bring them out. Rare old jester, sweet birds of song!"

"And you came—for me?"

Paul shrugged his shoulders, and drew the pencilled brows into an odd, petulant frown.

"I should have come for you to-morrow. To-night I play in your villainous town. For a month I have been caged, chained, taken around like the monkey in a show—for the sake of a little money, my friend! Your trees are too leafless for birds' nests in winter. But when I saw the sun-brown hair I said—halt, here is my friend of the summer!"

Victor laughed cheerily.

"You will come home with me?"

"Not to-night, comrade. I must away to a rehearsal in place and scene. I would ask you to come, but it is torture to one's ears. Second-rate opera singers, and as for musicians —I am king among them—think of that!" with a laugh of gay contempt. "Ah, you will hear music over there!"

"And then—?"

"If you are not ready I will look in upon my friends at Bohmerwald. But to-morrow I will see you again. Addios."

They parted as their paths diverged. Victor felt that there was no better time for the duty that lay before him than this very evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a trifle cool this May evening, here in the outskirts of the town, so Anah Hurst let the logs smoulder on the hearth, instead of wetting them to blackened cinders, in her careful fashion. Victor brought down his books and read tranquilly for awhile, then began to chafe inwardly. He had gained a better command over himself, but he could hardly have been considered more patient.

He had promised himself a talk with his mother. This night his father had no urgent calls, it seemed, for he sat and dozed in his arm-chair. Victor wondered nervously why he did not go to bed.

A chance glance fell upon him and startled the young man. He was so accustomed to seeing his father night and morning, that the years had come and gone without his remarking any change until this moment, when the knowledge appeared to strike sharp against something in his soul.

The head was bowed a little, the smoothly-shaven chin resting on the breast. There were hollows in the temples, and hollows under the high cheek-bones, and the thin gray hair straggled about wearily, as if it had lost all healthy strength. The sunken eyes had leaden shadows underneath, and the skin was ashen gray. The under-jaw had fallen a trifle, and he looked death-like in this stillness.

An old man. A soul that had worn out the body in vain efforts to teach the pauper rabble yonder, to save them—fit them for heaven, and he smiled with a little scorn. And when a day came in which he could labor no longer, what then?

If there was anything in the religion they taught, if it made

people tender and considerate of others, generous, loving as their great Leader loved, they would never let this man, who had given up all for the cause, come to any want. They would shelter and care for him in his old age, they would give him a little foretaste of rest before he reached the other country. There were societies who made no pretensions to anything but morals, and yet did this.

The old mahogany clock in the corner struck nine. That roused him. He stared wildly about for a moment, out of pale eyes dazed by sudden contact with the light. The thin hands trembled as he tried to grasp the chair-arms.

"I must have fallen into a doze;" the voice quivering with a kind of piteous accent. "I think—I'll go to bed. I wonder why I should be so tired! The flesh is weak—weak."

He swayed forward as he rose, but after a moment steadied himself. Anah lighted another candle.

"I will go up with you," she said, gravely.

Once, and not very long ago, John Hurst's step had been vigorous and forcible. Not full of ring and elasticity, but the solid, unswerving will of the man. To-night it seemed to stumble over the steps, as if it could not be lifted high enough, and in the room overhead it shuffled weakly. Yes, an old man, worn out before his time! And the promise, "As thy day so shall thy strength be," was a bitter mockery to Victor Hurst.

He heard the voice falter slowly through a prayer. Yes, it was greatly changed. Some uncomfortable touch of conscience pricked him. After he was gone—

"But he gave his life for *them*, not me," he muttered fiercely. And if there is anything in it all—why it *should* be a stronger bond even than blood."

Was it his duty to stay here and give up his own prospects when he had no hand in the sacrifice?

He rose and paced the floor impatiently. Why should these perplexing thoughts haunt him now, of all times!

He heard the soft step at last, and the door was pushed aside, but in his walk to that end of the room he closed it again. Mrs. Hurst began to fasten the shutters, gathered her sewing in the wide basket, and smothered the fire.

"I want to talk to you—" as she stood, undecided.

She caught the husky strand in his voice, and a great spasm ran through her frame.

"Are you cold? Here is your shawl."

A little square of gray flannel bound with brown ribbon. He folded it awkwardly over her shoulders.

"No, I am not cold," in a curiously calm voice. How slow of brain and fine sense men were.

"I want to talk to you,—next Wednesday I shall be twenty-one;" going at once to the point instead of any tender, feminine beating about.

"Yes," slowly, looking at the flickering blaze of the candle, but seeing only darkness about her.

"Sit down;" for she appeared pale and tired, it seemed to him. "It will be—quite a long story."

She dropped into her low rocker, and he began to pace the floor again. It took him so much farther away—out of her steady gaze, for the eyes were set and could not follow him up and down.

"I am going away—as I said before. I've stayed so that no one's word might be broken, and next Wednesday I shall be quite free."

Quite free—owing no one any duty, any tenderness, any thought for the old age closing round, the sickness or poverty that might befall. Oh, yes, quite free!

"And if you would like to know my plans"—a trifle annoyed at her silence.

"Yes, I should, Victor;" still calmly. If she had swerved one hair's breadth, it would have been her confession to her son, not his to her.

"I have told you about Paul Latour. We made a plan

last summer, only I did not know how well he was to be depended upon then, to go away together. I saw him to-night."

"The musician—yes;" rocking herself to and fro.

"We are going to Europe. I have some kind of genius in me I know," his voice dropping to a sturdy, persistent key. "It will come out there. As for this old life, you know I've always hated it! It has been daily martyrdom to me down there in the shop. Father did it for the best," rather more softly.

"Yes, he did. I want you always to think of it in that light;" an earnestness gleaming up her pale face.

"I wonder that he ever had such a child!" with an abrupt, half-laugh that was used instead of an exclamation. "There is not one likeness between us—mental or physical. I can't understand, somehow. And he has seemed to go against every cherished hope of my life, but he meant it in kindness, no doubt. He never sees anything as I see it, and after all, a man's own feelings and wishes are best to himself. I wanted the chance at engraving, you know?"

"But that would have taken you entirely away from home, thrown you among strangers. And Mr. Maverick's character was notoriously bad. No, *I* couldn't have thrust you into such temptation."

A scornful smile crossed his face and worked in his nostrils.

"Because the Norcross men were church members he thought the shop was like a daily prayer-meeting. He stopped me in the first complaint that I ever made, and I thought then that if I was led to perdition I never would utter another. But I've heard oaths and stories there that would chill any nice, clean blood. I've seen some of the men too drunk to stand. Connor had the delirium tremens last winter, but he is a splendid workman when sober. They can't answer for every one, you know. However, I *have* kept myself free from the curse!

"Thank God. I think there is still some—"

"Grace left in me," with a short laugh. "Well, I have had some finer impulses. I don't believe I should have been as bad and restless in boyhood if I had had a good strong interest, books of the right kind to read, and all that. But learning Psalms was my abomination! I don't believe that I'm naturally religious."

"None of us are. We are saved by God's grace only. Our righteousness would be filthy rags in His sight."

"Mother, I've come to believe differently, if I have any belief at all. Every good act *must* be better in His sight than a vile one. And it seems to me a religion that will not keep men truthful or honest, is not worth much. Yet how many men overreach in a bargain, or grind the faces of the poor—cheat the widow and the orphan!"

"Oh, Victor, don't rail! It cuts me to the quick."

"I never knew you or my father to tell a lie, and you give on every hand, instead of taking. But we'll let religion alone. I cannot see through his eyes, or think with his brain. He never understood my commonest want, from the day he refused me sugar in my tea until now. And very likely I fret him, jar upon his most tender nerves. So you see we shall be better friends apart."

Not a word of her. Had she come to be nothing in her son's life?

"But what will you do?" in a vague, distressed tone, wringing the thin fingers.

"Work my way. I am young and strong. I'll try all things until I come to the one I like, and I fancy that it will be something fit for a gentleman. Did you ever imagine that I *could* be satisfied over yonder in the machine-shop?"

"Oh, my child, it is so hard to know what is right;" with a sob just under her breath.

"But you understand that it is best for me to go away. I

want to travel—to see men and life. I have a great, hungry soul, that utterly refuses the milk-and-water diet on which some fatten. I should be restless and miserable here."

She felt every word. More than all, she knew how he came by these fine instincts—this ambition. He should have been born among eagles. And yet her heart cried out for the one comfort of her life.

"How long should you stay?"

Her voice was husky, and she held her hand over her eyes, as if to shade them from the light. But she need not have been so scrupulous, he was not on the watch for tears.

"I don't know;" slowly. "Until I had done something that would give me a place at home, in my own country I mean, for I should never come back *here*, the very sight of it is hateful in my eyes."

"And I should be dead," in a low tone.

"Dead—in a few years!" but the expression of unbelief died away on his lips. Then he came nearer. "Mother," he said, in a voice of strong emotion, "*do* you want me to stay, and live a poor, miserable, dissatisfied life—never be anything? I think it is in me to rise. I want freedom and a broad space. I could make no one believe in me here; for they would always believe in the smoke and grime of the shop instead. Why, a few hours ago even, Norcross advised me to stick to work, to marry in *my own* station—which is so much lower than his, of course."

"Oh!" she murmured, with a strangely soft intonation; for somehow, the picture of wife and little children seemed sweet to her lonely, aching heart.

"And when I looked at his coarse skin, and his stubby, squat features—for they all appear to be crowded together—and the overlaying of gross flesh with which ease has covered his square frame, I couldn't help thinking, that so far as mere physique went, I stood on a plane above him. And as for soul—how much is there in his small, faded, blue eyes? Yet,

people looking at his gold, call him handsome and a gentleman! Faugh!"

"He is a good man, and so was his father."

"Good! It is easy to fling away a little gold when a man's pockets are gorged with it, and his stomach full and comfortable of the very fat of the land! Why, a thousand to him is no more than a penny to you. But if there's anything in blood, as some people believe," remembering Sylvia's complacent verdict, "I fancy he has a small share of the old blue current. And I wanted to ask you who the Hursts were?"

"I don't know. Your father came from Albany, and had few if any relatives."

"You, then? For I have a current in my veins, I fancy, that is purer and clearer than that of most people, with a strength and daring in it which means something. But maybe it is brain."

"Our family was good, with a Scotch descent, the McRaes;" a little pride lowering her voice to fineness.

"Maybe I have some of the Scotch persistence; but what I feel strongest is a kind of odd, glowing, fiery life, not unlike that of a handsome thorough-bred, rarely driven. It is the being put to carting and rough work that makes me cry out. I like those old Greeks and Romans, of whom I have been reading this winter. I suppose you cannot understand me, and think it foolish;" pausing abruptly, and with a little testiness in his voice.

"Yes, I understand." Hers was full of curious flickering hollows, as if she were out of doors, and it came to him over hill and dale. "I understand. I have known it always."

"Then you must know what martyrdom my life—would be—" He meant to say, "is," but he had hardly the graceless courage.

"Yes. It will be best for you to go. When doves hatch eagles they must look to see them fly skyward;" in a resolute voice, as if she were passing sentence on herself.

"I am glad to have you look at it in this light."

"I expected you to go." Now that she had resolved, she threw the old life behind her, and was brave. When the heart has been crushed, what matters the body?

"Only—I should like to know your plans, if you will tell me."

"I have been doing over-work, and saved a little money—a hundred dollars. Everything is so much cheaper abroad, and you can travel the continent over with a knapsack and staff. Paul has been everywhere. And if I am to be an artist," recalling the sneer Mr. Norcross had given, "I shall find my inspiration under those balmy, golden skies."

"Oh!" with the first touch of pride that she experienced. "When will you go?"

"As soon as I can after Wednesday. I see no use of waiting."

"No!" with a little gasp that was fain to shape itself into a sob, and curbed only by her strong power of repression.

For she deemed it unwise, as well as useless to persuade him against his will. There really was nothing for him here. He *was* fitted for something higher and finer than shop-labor, and in spite of John Hurst's rigid training, it had managed to thrive apace. And she had a fancy that they two, husband and wife, would be happier when he was gone. His presence disturbed her tranquil faith, filled her with doubt and perplexity, and took her mind from her duties to those around her. If she could only be clear as to her duty concerning him; but will and duty lay far apart here. And if she made this last sacrifice of human affection, laid him upon the altar like another Isaac, would not her duty be done?

"I should like to ask Paul here. He is very different from —most of the people with whom you and my father associate. But he suits me;" with a touch of defiance in his tone.

"I know that we cannot choose friends for you;" sighing a little.

"And when I am gone, don't worry about me. I shall

do well enough; a great fellow like me, with youth and health, ought, I'm sure. I shall write often to you, and at the last, whatever I win you shall share with me. I think you'll not miss me long, and you will be rid of a deal of care!"

Ah, how little he understood a mother's love. Glad to be rid of the trouble of her child—and no other growing up to take his place? Ah, blind, pitiless youth!

"Would my father object, I wonder? Other young men are free to invite friends."

"He will not object."

She meant to take care of that. During this last week of his life with them, he should not be fretted, nor have any hard remembrances to take with him. If she sat in sackcloth and ashes afterward, if she fasted and prayed that the devil of passionate and unsanctified love should be cast out of her, that would be a matter between her and God. Victor need never know.

For she had a vague presentiment that she should never see him again. If he should raise himself to the height of his aspiration, she would not be a fit companion for him in that finer and more cultured world in which he meant to play his part. An old woman in plain caps and a stuff gown—when those whom he would learn to admire went clad in rich silks and soft laces!

"I have not said a word to him yet;" studying the snowy boards of the floor. "I wanted to tell you first."

"I think I had better explain it to him—"

"I'm not a coward, mother, to shift this load to your shoulders. He may feel tempted to lay the blame of my defection on your over-indulgence," with a short laugh.

"I can make him understand it more easily, I think. My blood is cooler than yours, and I shall be more patient."

He was very glad to be relieved of it, and yet it seemed a shabby thing to him. He dreaded to discuss the matter with his father, for he knew well that he would meet with opposition and intolerance.

"If you wish to," he rejoined, slowly.

"I do."

Then she rose, for it seemed as if her burden was as great as she could bear. One straw more might force the waiting cry through her bloodless lips.

There was nothing more to be said on his side. He had stated his case very clearly and forcibly, he thought; convinced her, and won her assent. Ah, he could not see the underlying current. Well perhaps that it was so.

Anah Hurst went about the house the next day like one in a deep shadow. It seemed to look out of the lengthened twilight of her eyes, to hover about her pale compressed lips. More than once she essayed to open the subject with her husband, for it seemed a rather quiet time with him. He sat in his arm-chair and read a good deal,—meditations of holy Christian men who had given their lives and all they possessed to the cause, who had dedicated their children to God's service, and trained them up to bear fruit for the Master. Once or twice she came and glanced over his shoulder, then shrank away, stricken to the heart's core.

The afternoon drew to a close. She stirred her fire and put on the kettle. The sewing in her basket had been finished, and the knitting was in no haste now. So by and by she said softly, "John!"

He started, and his book fell to the floor.

"I believe I was dozing;" with a feeble smile. "Did you speak?"

"Yes;" glancing fearfully at the clock. Just half an hour's grace before Victor would come to supper, bringing his friend, perhaps. "I had something to tell you, to discuss with you, though it is all settled,—for the best, let us trust. I think it is God's will."

He looked into her grave, troubled face. She remembered afterward what a curiously vague expression there was in his

eye, and how the muscles of his thin face seemed to twitch beyond his control.

She said her say with a wife's tender grace and a mother's devotion to her son's cause. No one knew better than she how to explain Victor's waywardness.

Victor Hurst crossed the lots fifteen minutes later and came up on the left side of the porch. The vines had not grown into their summer profusion of leaf and bloom. He halted a moment, attracted by the low-lying level bars of light in the western sky. A peculiar gray-looking sunset, with a storm brooding a little farther back, to come with the dawn, perhaps.

And these words floated out to him, in a trembling, hollow tone,

"I've tried to do my duty—I think God will bear me witness. But sometimes I've fancied that if I'd had a child of my own flesh and blood, I might have learned something by the very tie which God gives to open our eyes, to teach us wisdom and strength. I've tried to love him, but he always kept away as if he knew. I never meant to make any difference, but perhaps I've been ignorant. How could I tell?"

A swarthy flush crossed the young face, in which there was the purple agony of black, bitter pain. He moved noiselessly away, dragging his limbs as if they had been palsied. Not John Hurst's son! When he had said, with boyish heat, that not a drop of the man's blood ran in his veins, he had never dreamed of a shameful, hidden truth!

He crawled down to the old apple-tree, whose clustering buds were faintly scenting the air, and threw himself at the moss-grown base, sick with passionate anguish. Not John Hurst's son!

CHAPTER IX.

John Hurst and his wife sat a long while over their simple tea-table, though neither of them ate anything. She had persuaded him into taking some tea, and he sipped it idly in an absent, wandering fashion; a strange grayness settling about his temples and the tremulous mouth, which could not steady itself for the aguish nervousness.

Her tears dropped silently. They had been going over the old life; and though in his great love for her he had never questioned the wisdom of their marriage before, he felt weak and uncertain now. He had wished then to save her from pain and shame, for how much of the world would have believed her story as he did. He understood so well the sweetness and purity of her nature, and the strand of womanly tenderness underlying it all, the fine sensitive nerves that could be wrung and tortured by the merest word or look. In his keeping she would be so secure! The child would be to him like a son.

It had not come to pass. And now he saw her heart torn by a divided duty. What if he should relinquish his claim? Would she go with her son?

They waited unconsciously for Victor. Then his mother set the tea down by the coals, and washed the dishes they had used. Always after supper came the time for family prayers. John Hurst waited until the candle was lighted, and then drew forth the old Bible to read the chapter. His voice faltered as if some vital chord had met with a sudden rough jar, and could not readily swing back into the old groove.

The faded leathern cover was closed, and the glasses care-

fully wiped and laid atop. They then knelt for their evening prayer.

John Hurst led a blameless, self-sacrificing life; his purposes were honorable and right in the sight of all men, and if he exacted ought from others, he gave twice that himself. But he always looked at the duty first: the terror of the law before the benignity of love. If he had little indulgence for the follies of others, he had less yet for his own; but any great sin found in him a tender comforter when the first stern judgment had passed.

To-night he prayed fervently for the boy. All the old love with which he had watched his baby steps seemed to come out. Anah listened in dim amaze. A strange, soft tremor in his voice: little pauses as if now and then he could hardly remember what he most wished to say. And he supplicated for grace and patience to help them bear whatever burdens might be sent upon them, to enable them to make any sacrifice demanded by God, that their eyes might be slow to perceive.

He came and kissed her afterward. It was so long since he had done this. In his eagerness to crucify self, he had well-nigh relinquished human affection and desires.

"Anah," he said, picking at his thin fingers, "I have been studying over a subject near and vital to us both. I think the Lord has granted me strength to see aright. It may be your duty lies with him, the boy," nodding his head feebly to the shadowy window distance. "And if you like to go—"

"Oh, no, no, John! My vow is to you. Did you think that meanly of me? And if I cared to go, he does not want me!" with passionate sadness in her voice. "He can carve out his own fortune, and has outgrown baby-love and fondness. No, I belong to you. All my duty now lies to you and to God."

There was something in the puzzled, abstracted face quite new to her, and an air of groping, as if he had lost his way in some mysterious fashion. A week ago he was strong and

resolute, to-night he seemed to wish to cling to her, although he would not so much as stretch out his wasted fingers.

She drew one arm around her neck.

"I can never forget, John, how many years you have given shelter to the boy and me, a name when we might have been nameless. I said then—'Till death do us part,' and I mean it to-night. If I have sometimes failed in duty or love," and she tried hard to keep back the emotion that choked her and stifled all the air about, "forgive. There will be only us two to love to the end."

With that her days of wearisome doubt were ended. Her duty was here. Let youth follow its wayward will—as she had once; but experience told her not to long for golden apples on that far shore where the lifeless, sluggish sea washed out their flavor. And yet how she had wavered betwixt the two! How she had doubted and questioned God!

John Hurst took her to his heart. She thought, with a curious thrill, how much stronger she seemed of the two. Besides the wife's love, called into action again, there was a sense of protection, as if she would be needed ere long to shield him from some unseen blow.

"I am tired," he said, presently. "I think I will not wait for Victor. Something has detained him. Will you light my candle?"

She carried it up for him. His breath came hard and short, and his feet dragged slowly. Her step was like a girl's, and she seemed strong enough to-night for anything,—quite like the old time youth. Then she sat by the open window and sang for him until he fell asleep.

Before she went down she passed her hand softly over the thin hair, murmuring, "Poor John! dear, brave soul! I never knew until to-night how deep the pain had gone! A son of his own, who, perhaps, would not desert him in his old age. God forgive us for our blindness and cruelty."

Victor had not come yet. The lonesome kitchen struck a

chill to her very soul, and throwing a shawl over her head, she walked down the path to the silent, deserted street. It was quite cloudy now, with drifts scudding about the sky, blown by the fresh spring wind. After she had been out awhile she could distinguish the shapes of the trees as the coming storm writhed about in their branches. Where was Victor? Were he and his friend Paul making arrangements—laying in a little store of the articles they would need?

Ah, well! she had given him all that was necessary out of *her* life. Days and nights of watchful care, love, devotion; denying herself little gratifications that he might have the more.

And yet how strange! The old morbid feeling about it was all gone. She would be content to stay here, a poor, childless, forgotten woman, for it would come to that in time.

When she was tired of her fruitless waiting at the gate, she bethought herself that there was no fresh water for night, and taking the pail, went down to the well. Something stirred under the old apple-tree, and caused her to give a little cry of affright.

"It is I, mother; do not be alarmed."

If it had not been for the "mother" in the sentence, she would not have known the voice—so hoarse, and strained, and changed.

"Victor!" with wild apprehension, her usually soft tones rendered shrill by terror.

"Yes, mother!" with the impatience of some mortal pain or wound.

"Where have you been? The supper has waited for hours!"

"Supper! I could never eat another mouthful in that house if I were starving! Oh, mother, mother!"

"What is it, Victor?" stretching out her arms through the dark and finding her child's face, which burned against her soft, cool hand.

"What is it?" he asked hoarsely, putting her away with a rough movement. "It is the blight and stain on my own life, that I never knew until now!"

"The blight!" and a sudden shiver seized her in a giant's grasp. "The shame—"

"Yes!" She felt that he was rising from the ground. "I am not John Hurst's child, but I think I have a right to know my father's name!"

"Oh, my God!"

She was silent so long, that he feared she had fainted, and reached out his hand to find her kneeling within an arm's length of him.

"Mother!" in a gentler tone.

"Who told you that?" But her voice was like a reed in a storm.

"I heard *him* say so. I came home earlier than usual—across the lot; and just as I struck the porch, he said his wish had been for a child of his own flesh and blood. But he shall never again look upon a sight so hateful in his eyes. I don't know why I have stayed here, like a blind, helpless fool—"

"Hush!" she said, peremptorily. "You and I owe him a great deal. God knows how grand and generous his heart has been."

"A home and a name!" angrily. "I wish he had let me die an outcast instead!"

"People do not always die;" steadying her voice.

"So you see, if I had never gone before, I must go now;" with a bitter, scornful laugh. "I have been crazy to loiter here. I should have stolen away, like the thing I am, under shelter of night."

Every word stabbed her. For a moment the agony appeared greater than she could bear.

"I think I have a right to some justification in my son's eyes. No living soul besides my husband and I is aware of the secret. It is not quite what you imagine."

Something in her voice, strong with anguish, yet strangely clear and proud, moved him.

"You *were* married, then!" gasping painfully.

Where could the story be told better than under the cover of night and darkness? For now he must know and judge. Since he had heard that much, a mystery of the rest would be of no avail.

"I considered myself married. I went through an honorable ceremony by a person I then supposed to be a clergyman. I was inexperienced, and had led a most secluded life; besides, then I had no reason to doubt my—my lover," with a strong effort. "For three months I was a happy wife—oh, God!"

Victor caught the pain in her voice, something that strained it to its utmost tension.

"And when you blame any one let it be me, wild with grief as I was then; but not the man who, in spite of it all, offered me his love and his name; who was tender, patient, and in all these years has uttered no word of regret; who to-night breathed the first wish that I ever heard him utter. You might have been a son to him."

"But fate was against me!" in a shrill tone, which had in it the sense of bitter, acrid pain.

"Was it? Or some far curse of blood that kept you always fretting and angered? He gave me my free choice to-night, to go with you, or stay; and I chose the love that had been tried to the utmost and was still true. You wrong him in your hot, unreasoning verdict. He is a good man."

"And my father was—forgotten!" in his sharp, boyish way.

"Forgotten! My God, when I had so much to remember! You are too young to understand women's hearts. But if you mean that I ought to have loved him and clung to him, when he barred the way first by marrying for the sake of a fortune, you mistake the pride and purity of my soul. For I am better to-day than he. I have deceived no one, wronged no one,

though society visits such faults or misfortunes on the woman's head rather than the man's."

He rose and shuddered with such force that the vibrations of air swept to her like a gust.

"So, that was my father! And what has happened to him since?"

"Nothing but good fortune on every side. He came of a proud, old family, and married back into it, that none of the broad lands might be alienated. He has prospered, held positions of trust and honor, and has a son to carry down his name. I suppose he is happy."

"And you believe in a God who rewards the good and punishes the evil—after all that!"

"I believe in a God who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.'"

He smote the rough trunk of the tree with his fist, and never felt the scratched and bruised knuckles.

"I think if I knew who the man was I should murder him." His mother shivered at the passion in his voice.

"You will never know;" with a breathless flutter, as if he might turn and wrest the secret from her.

"Perhaps it is as well," laughing bitterly. "For I feel like Ishmael: that my hand is against every man. I am an outlaw."

"No, you are not an outlaw. A man makes himself what he will! You have the same youth, the same strength and courage, and the same aims you had this morning. To the end John Hurst will be your father. Will you throw up everything and whine weakly when you have only to do as you planned before?"

"But it seems as if some strength had gone out of me;" roused a little by her words that appeared to sting him dully.

"Yes, it always does in a great blow. But it will come back. In the life you mean to lead the next few years, they question no one about birth. And when you have won fame

and position, your face will be sufficient passport anywhere. If a man makes his mark, society will open her golden door unhesitatingly. It is women who suffer, not men."

There was a strange bitterness in her voice. Instead of this sharp philosophy, she would rather have held his throbbing temples to her bosom, and kissed the wavering, burning lips. She guessed from the father what the dangers to the son might be.

"I thought you did not want me to go!" with an almost querulous unreasonableness.

"If you could have been content; but *I* know you never will be, here. Do you think it cost me so little to give up my child? Why, Victor, it has been a going up to the wilderness to be tempted. This bare, coarse, common life looked horrible without you, and all the kingdoms of the world shining afar off. I was ready to fall down and worship Satan, so that I might but have you. But I knew in my soul that the day I sheltered myself in John Hurst's great love against the world's contumely, I gave up the right of choice. So I have had my fight and conquered; and you must do the same."

He reached out his arms and took her to his heart. She felt the great bounds of passion and pain, and trembled there in his strong clasp.

"Mother, your voice is like the ring of martial music. I never knew that you were so brave!"

The pangs had ennobled her—lifted her out of herself, and the narrow round that had trammelled her. She had a large, clear brain, when you came to that, and a sturdy self-reliance.

"Go with me," he cried. "Be my inspiration. I cannot fail then."

Her heart gave a great leap. And yet, was it not rather as a comrade than as a mother he needed her. The temptation in any light was one of exquisite pain, and she felt the fire of ambition running through her veins like a subtle, forceful

flame. In the old days she had dreamed of rousing another soul into purer and higher life; of guiding the aims, the intellect, and the heart into harmonious channels. Instead, she had brought ruin upon herself.

"No," in her voice of pure, clear courage, "my duty is with *him.* I think he is hardly as strong this spring as heretofore. So I must stay. But change is better for you."

"Yes," absently.

"You will think kindly of him when you are away. Remember that he did what he thought for the best. He had seen another,—brilliant, fascinating, dangerous—a mind not able to concentrate itself strongly upon one purpose or belief, scatter anguish broadcast; and he wanted, most of all, to have you steadfast, sincere, true. If he mistook the way, as I think we both did, his motives were pure. He never grudged you anything; and it has been his ceaseless regret that he knew not how to win your love."

"I forgive him all. God alone knows how hard it must have been to see me in the place his children might have filled. Yes, I understand his fear."

"You will come in,—it is growing late."

"I was a boor and a brute to you awhile ago, and unjust to him; but I suffered fearfully. To think the very blood of which I had been so proud in its unlikeness to his, should have that stain upon it!"

He felt the tremor running along her pulses, and his heart smote him.

"Not through any sin of yours," he cried vehemently, clasping the cold hand in his. "How could you tell?"

"No, I could not tell. It was my misfortune to love him, to trust him. I had no mother to help me with clear eyes and wise counsel. My father was old and in delicate health, and he had never been keen or distrustful. A visionary in many things, ready to believe the best of any one; courteous,

gentlemanly, honorable to the farthest verge. And he liked our guest," with a little faltering over the term, "so well. He and John Hurst were our only visitors."

"You knew *him*, then?" and Victor started.

"He was our neighbor; a grave, quiet man, verging on to forty. I liked him as one might an elder brother, and never imagined the truth. The other was young, with all the graces and sweetness of those golden days, a man to win a girl's fancy. But when he first spoke I was incredulous, and made him wait to be certain of his own regard. During those six months of probation, I learned to love him better; and I think he loved me. We planned our life together; its ambitions and possibilities, its high, pure aims that were to unfold like some clear spring morning, behind whose skies of perfect blue lay prophesy of blossom and ripening fruit, and cool, green foliage. I knew that he would have some property. His grandfather, it seems, wished him to marry his cousin, and thus unite the two fortunes; but the poor old man was hovering on the brink of the grave. He was going home one time, and persuaded me into this marriage, that he might have the more courage to confess it to his grandfather. But he came back with the secret still untold. For three months we kept it, then he was again recalled. I never saw him afterward."

"But he did not dare disavow the whole transaction?" And Victor's voice was terrible in the strength of his passion.

"He did. Not that he could have looked into my face and said it. I begged, and prayed, and plead for an interview. If I had known where to find him, I must have gone and enforced my claim, right in the sight of God at all events. But I did not. I was utterly helpless. He had taken our certificate in the beginning. Then I strove to discover the minister who married us; but there had never been such a clergyman settled in the small town. I knew, then, that fate was too strong, and that the whole world would be against me."

"My poor, poor mother!"

Victor Hurst kissed the soft cheek, throbbing with the heat and soreness of the old wound.

"I tell you this because I do not want you to misjudge me in the years to come. This man crowned us with thorns and led us through a Via Doloroso, while he took the brightness, the ease, and the gold. And the other—"

"John Hurst. Go on. It is right that I should know;" the words almost strangling under his breath.

"He offered his great love that had kept silent until then. He urged for my father's sake, for my own. He knew how cruel the world could be to a woman. For the sake of my father and—my child, I consented. Which of the two would have been the better birthright, dear?" turning her face to his through all the darkness.

"I understand you. Yes, I suppose it *was* best. I know, now, why—I can see the fears *he* had for me. It was very noble and heroic in him, and when I am away I shall forget the petty jarring, and remember him as rarely generous, thus to put another man's child in the place of his own."

They turned and walked together toward the house.

"Let it all go on as before," she said, pleadingly. "It would break his heart to know he had betrayed the secret kept sacredly so many years. And it is only for a few days. I have a presentiment that you will never see him again."

Victor stooped and kissed his mother in the doorway. The flame of the candle, burned down to its socket, flared across the hall with a dull reddish tinge. He saw a strange new light in her face, as if it had suddenly burst its olden trammels of conventionalism. There was a nervous strength in the broad white forehead, in the heats coming and going, as if they travelled with her thoughts; the dusky eyes burning with steady, luminous lights, and the lips set firmly, brilliant as if the rose and scarlet of her youth had come back again. The slow restraint that had grown year by year into a mould of impassiveness had been shattered by some far inward force,

and she seemed to stand there enfranchised from the life with which he had always connected her, strong and beautiful in his sight.

"Mother! Mother!" and the tone was like a sad wail, piercing her very soul, "how can I give you up? For you seem to belong to me with a finer bond than there is between most mothers and sons."

For to-night all the strength and sweetness and power rose and asserted itself, and surprised her as well. She had broken through the smooth platitudes of every-day life and raised the old spirit of herself out of that haunting, buried past. And still her soul was torn asunder, though God only saw the strife.

"Yes, I belong to you," proud that he at last had understood and acknowledged her claim. "But when I took this good man's name wherewith to shadow myself and you, I also took another duty."

"Yes," weakly; clinging to her fingers as if loth ever to part again. "Yes. Yet sometime—"

"When I am free, if you want me I will come. I shall be an old woman then."

"But my mother, always."

She drew him to her and kissed the throbbing temples. It seemed as if all the years of patient agony were repaid now. The secret for which she would have died sooner than tell him, had brought him back instead of estranging him.

CHAPTER X.

It was past midnight when they separated. Alone in his own room, Victor Hurst felt as if a decade of years had passed over him with the force of a fiery wirlwind. The boyhood of yesterday, with its foolish pride, its crude, unreasoning passions, had been almost swept out of sight. A strong, sad man, who was henceforth to live a little in the shadow,—who, when he had carved his own way and brought himself up to any new height, would not be quite as other men.

Then he thought of the night at Bohmerwald, of Sylvia Redmond. Not that there had been any wild dreams concerning her, but he knew now that the dewy scarlet lips had banned him out of her world as effectually as if he had been guilty of some crime. Even his ambition lay at his feet like a dead corse. Would there be any voice of resurrection for it, any morning when the stone should be rolled away?

To Paul Latour it would make but little difference. Not that he meant the secret should ever pass his lips. He had the honor of another in his keeping now. Yet he felt wronged and outraged by the world's arbitrary law. If he could find the man who had worked them this evil—and his fingers clinched nervously, with a grip in them that would not be good for the throat of him who had lied to both God and a woman.

But there was no reason now why he should stay, and every consideration in favor of his going. John Hurst would have been more than human if he had loved this boy as one of his own. Victor could see the many struggles now, the effort the old man had made to train him in habits of rigid truth, honor

and industry, as he understood them. No dangerous romance or idle philosophy was to be allowed a foothold.

Pshaw! Was he a bit of iron ore to be dug out of the ground, melted, refined, hammered, and shaped into some useful but lifeless thing, or a stone dug out of yonder quarry to be chiselled smooth and put into its place? Had he no right to try the world for himself, to have his own beliefs and aims, until manhood crowned him by the virtue of his twenty-one years?

He walked to the open window that the cool wind might chase away the fever-heat of his blood. Throwing his tawny hair aside, still damp with dews of the grass, where he had held his tearless vigil, his throbbing brow took the clean, sweet spring gust, with its undertone of rain. The night was very dark now, and solemn in its silence. A time to cry unto God for help; but was God at hand, and did He take note of these paltry daily events?

He was in no mood to sleep. All the discordant elements of existence were roused; the subtle, far-reaching forces,—the mysterious depths in which lurked crude hopes, passions, and affections, looming up with the indistinctness of uncalled phantoms, which were to develop the soul for which they were sent to act, according to their strength and power, into that nobility which should do honor to its Maker, or to swell the list of wretched, unfaithful beings, who allow themselves to drift beyond refuge, doubting their own power to escape from the influences dragging them down, and God's mercy held out to the last.

There came a soft rush of rain from the distant hills, with the damp, fragrant odor of young grass, and the pungent aroma of the pines. How tender all the great hushed world seemed! Six months hence he might be lying under other skies, and have the drowsy lap of waves floating through his brain. But he should never forget this hour.

"Victor!"

He heard the step and the voice at the same instant. Open-

ing the door he stretched out his hand to his mother, for the light had long since flickered its last.

"Will you come to *him?*" Her voice held in it the breathless awe of great pain and terror. "For—I think he is dying."

Victor took one step into the hall.

"You have not been in bed?" grasping his hand with her cold, trembling fingers.

"No."

"It is near morning. Nearly four when I looked at his watch. And you have been thinking all this time?"

"I was not sleepy," in a brief tone, as if he would rather shut himself out of her thoughts.

A candle was burning on the table at the bed's head, and shed a ghastly glare over the pallid face with its half-open eyes, and parted, colorless lips, that looked almost as if the under-jaw had fallen. A strange, hard breathing, with an awesome rattle in the sound.

"How long have you noticed this?"

"A little while; five minutes, perhaps. He was sleeping heavily when I came in, and has scarcely stirred."

She looked at her son with eager, questioning eyes, but her own face was deathly pale.

Victor tried to rouse him. When he raised the wasted frame the respiration became more labored; but there was little sign of consciousness. The features were gray and rigid.

"Have you tried any—restoratives?"

There was nothing at hand but the old-fashioned, clean, smelling camphor. Victor bathed his face with this, and chafed the apparently pulseless wrists.

Moment after moment, and yet there was no change—no sign either of life or speedy dissolution.

"We can do nothing. I know so little of sickness," with a wan half-smile. "Shall I call in a neighbor while I go for the nearest doctor?"

"No, I will stay alone. But you had better go immediately."

She was thinking how many times John Hurst had been roused from his bed to minister to the sick and dying. How he had gone uncomplainingly out into cold, and storm, and darkness, to some poor wretch stupefied with vile liquor, and shivering over a forlorn handful of fire. He had done the rough, hard work, while his brethren slept at their ease.

There was no change in him during her watch. It might have been ten minutes or an hour, for she let the moments go by uncounted. When she heard the footsteps on the path below, she lighted a fresh candle and went out into the hall. Doctor Willard, looking boyishly small beside Victor's towering figure.

"Mrs. Hurst," and he gave his hand with something beyond professional formality, "I don't wonder. I told him, only yesterday, that he was wearing himself out fast. But, said he, in his solemn way, 'Better rub out than rust out.' Yet I believe every man has a right to his own life!"

They entered the small room, clean and comfortable, but with no attempt at ornamentation. A grave expression came over the doctor's round, plump, little face, and he bit his thin lips under cover of the bristling, gray moustache, as he felt the limp, nerveless wrist.

He began by first inquiring minutely into the symptoms that had preceded the attack, which, to his keen eye, was declared paralysis.

"Worn out!" he exclaimed, with a slow shake of the head. "When will men learn that there is a slow suicide, as culpable, I hold it, as the more speedy poison. A good man, rabid on the one subject—his duty—as if God required the impossible! But we must get to work."

The gray dawn came slowly up in the wet, heavy sky, chilling the air as the night had not done, and the east wind was raw. The three thought little of it. Their fire blazed within,

and their hands were busy, if their hearts beat dully with a vague, nameless pain.

"It is too late for much help," the Doctor said, in his low, measured tone. "He may lie this way for several days, for he has a little of the old iron in his constitution. The probabilities are, however, that he will rally somewhat, and live eight or ten days, perhaps."

The verdict scarcely surprised them, and yet each heard it with a heavy heart. In how much had they been answerable for the result?

"Would any perplexity have brought it to a crisis?" Anah Hurst asked, in a tremulous voice.

"Perplexity! Well, he had enough of it, I suppose, with those poor wretches down yonder. I noticed the gray look in his face yester-morn, and the sunken eyes; and while I think, now, his voice had a sharp, shaky sound. It's been coming on some time, I should judge."

She drew a quick, gasping breath. She wanted to clear herself and her son from any complicity.

"He was talking awhile last evening rather excitedly, but he ate some supper afterward. He has failed a good deal latterly."

"No, I don't believe the talk hurt him." What could it have been but the salvation of souls, on which subject the Doctor thought him a little cracked. "It's been coming on some time; any man with half an eye can see that."

She drew a long, relieved breath, and glanced furtively at Victor.

"I'd get him down stairs, if I could. There'll likely be one and another in to see him."

"Yes;" in an absent way.

He went over to Mrs. Hurst, and took her hand.

"He has been a good man—a little queer in his ways to my thinking, but patient, self-denying, always ready to minister to others; and if there's any seventh heaven—I'm sure I've

heard it mentioned—he deserves it, although he would be the first to take the lowest seat in the synagogue. And so you needn't fear but that he will have his reward. 'Your loss will be his gain,' though I'm not much of a hand at quoting Scripture. And if we doctors could save everybody, it would set the good book sadly at naught."

"I know; yes! I know;" bowing her head.

"You have your son to comfort you."

The Doctor had gone so far out of his usual province that he had to clear his voice several times.

"I'll drop in again at noon. John Hurst never neglected a fellow-creature, and he shall not suffer for any attention. Good day! Good day!" bustling out with more ceremony than usual.

"They know it now," he muttered to himself; "but she'll take it hard, for all she looks so quiet. What a fine fellow that young Hurst is: don't take much after his father. When will people learn that they can't set the laws of health and common sense at defiance, even in the cause of religion? Dan'el went in the den of lions, to be sure; but for people to be going into dens of beasts and brutes in human shape, with all their filth and rum, and stench enough to kill you, when they're not forced to! Well, it may be religion; but it's death all the same. Early and late. No rest, no let up of any kind. Taking his life in his hand, and now it's worn to the last slender strand. Goodness me, how it does rain! and I without an umbrella!"

The Doctor blew his nose hard and trudged onward, his brain in a strange muddle. Did God require just what this man had been doing? There were plenty of others not half so hard worked, with a good deal better pay. But then it was a queer world.

Victor Hurst watched him down the street with a dull, undefined pain at his heart, not altogether for himself. Only—it seemed sad that any human life should have in it so much

labor and care, so little—what, pleasure? *He* was not looking for his reward here. And in the early days it had been different. Somehow he wanted to feel that there had been a little brightness in the life ebbing out to the chill ocean. Death at hand is such a horribly real thing to youth.

His mother came near and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"You heard?" she said, in a kind of wandering tone.

"Yes. It was not the talk last night. If he had loved me—" his dry lips quivering.

"He did love you. Can you never understand how it was?" with a little impatience.

"For your sake only. We *were* too unlike. Let it all go. I shall be a son to him as long as he lives."

"It is best not in any event to let him know."

"It is best."

"She kindled the fire, while Victor went up stairs again. Standing there, he studied the gray, rigid face, wishing from the depths of his soul that it had all been different, that he had been this man's child. For the strength and power and passion he found in his blood startled him.

"No, he could not have cared," he murmured. "It is not in human nature. I stood between, as it were, and divided the heart of the woman he loved. But, my God! is my prayer answered sharply as that?"

For only last night he had longed to have his mother to himself, and would have crowded out this feeble old man, with his years of devotion.

After their quiet breakfast, when each only made a pretence of eating, she began to plan for the change that must be effected. Off this room was another and a larger one, a very plain parlor where prayer-meetings were held, the few marriages that strayed to him solemnized, and penitents examined or comforted. One by one the ornaments had disappeared—bright, pretty, little things, which have so much home expression

in them for women. But when she saw that they distressed her husband, she removed them out of sight, bravely cutting off her right hand that it might not offend another.

A matting, rather worn, covered the floor; the chairs were old fashioned, cane seated; the centre-table, an ancient mahogany, handed down from her mother; a few religious pictures; a plain set of shelves for books, and perhaps the nearest approach to ornament was a pair of pale green-glass candlesticks—her silver ones had gone to feed the poor long ago.

"You will not go to the shop this morning? The bed must be brought here—it will be more convenient."

"Yes;" stripping off his coat that he had put on mechanically. "It had better be mine. We can arrange it all first, you know."

She bowed acquiescently, and they went to work. How strong he was with those smooth, supple limbs. She watched him with a peculiar pride.

In an hour the room was ready for its occupant.

"I will bring him down," he said.

"But you cannot—alone."

He smiled gravely, but turned and went up the stairs again.

If it had been a heavier burden he would still have desired to bear it. There was coming into his mind a sense of tender, sacred appropriation. This man had carried him about in his arms, a helpless baby, and he should owe no kindness to a stranger that he could perform for him.

There was no change that morning. The storm meanwhile had subsided into a slow drizzle. Doctor Willard looked in again at noon.

"I'll come and stay to-night," he said. "I have no important cases on hand." For he saw something in the tense lines that seemed to indicate a crisis.

To both Anah and her son the day was intolerably long, broken late in the afternoon by a few calls. It is so hard to

sit by in utter helplessness and see any human life drifting out, without reaching forth a hand to stem the current. But Dr. Willard, in his shrewd, practical way, would not have the old man tortured for so vague and slight a chance.

All the change that was to come for many days occurred that evening. John Hurst opened his eyes, began to breathe more naturally, took a little nourishment; but lay there like a log, unable to stir hand or foot.

"There's a good deal of grit in him yet," said the Doctor, grimly. "No one can tell how it will end."

The next day Victor Hurst went back to his old employment. Friday, Saturday, and then a blessed Sabbath-day of rest. A bright, genial May sky, with showers of apple-blossoms in the air, and wafts of sweetness.

There was a crowd in the little cottage all day long, for the news had only been recently noised about. And watching the faces, Victor felt that he had misjudged his father's work. Slow-brained and stolid, their dull eyes peering from under the ledge of receding brows; coarse, heavy jaws; hesitating and awkward in speech, until roused by the very excess of emotion, to them the figure lying there, so gray and wan, motionless as if already dead, had but one meaning. Some of the women began to sob hysterically.

"He come to me one day last winter, when we were freezin' and starvin', my man helpless in the bed, and not so much as a sup o' tea to wet his lips with. I'll never forget it, never! He run out again and brought us some food, and took the poor babby in his own arms and give it a drink of milk, and made up a fire. And poor Rob went safe at the last—I never heerd such prayers, never! I'm sure heaven must be for the likes of him."

"An' I shan't forget when poor Mary died," confessed an uncouth fellow outside the door, brushing his rough sleeve across his eyes. "In the old country she'd had the priest, but I wouldn't hear to it when she married me. We'd gone from

bad to worse, along o' the vile stuff she was allers beggin' me not to drink ; but she never took to no one till she saw *him* in the chapel, an' he come and prayed with her. An' I promised him, on her death-bed, that I'd never touch another drop; and God knows I've kept my word. He'd come across the street to shake hands wi' the likes of me, and allers wi' a kindly—'Dennis, how are you?' He never stood off on t'other side."

And there was the table loaded with mugs and bowls of broth, glasses of jelly, a slice of freshly-roasted beef, or a tender bit of steak. Whatever they had—out of their poverty and with much toil and anxiety—they prepared their best for him who had given so freely to them.

Not only tracts and sermons and prayers, it seemed. Not mere exhortations or denunciations. This was why he had pinched his own life, that he might have a little out of his pittance for them. For their perishing souls he had yearned in prayer through weary midnights.

Coarse and illiterate as they were, they preached an eloquent sermon to Victor Hurst. No deprivation or poverty could ever have brought him to their level ; for his instincts were those of a gentleman, come from whom they might. But something in the rude, tender gratitude touched him deeply. Was there more in religion than he had cared to believe of late? And did John Hurst, making the creed a little too strait at times, still have hold of the great everlasting truths? Ah, what else could have so moved these grovelling souls?

Two more days passed. There had been a slight amendment, if it could so be called, and with it had come the appetite of a famishing man. Anah fed him like a child, and he turned his slow-moving eyes upon her with the vacant stare of one long asleep, and who opens his eyes on strange sights.

"To-morrow," she said, coming to sit by her son at the open window, where a young moon began to climb the wide sky.

"To-morrow," he echoed slowly.

"And you have been counting on it so much for—almost a year?"

"Yes, I remember," with a peculiar smile. "One August day the flames burst out into an open blaze. I have never been the same since. But—perhaps, we all change. There must be some inward growth."

"And to-morrow you were—you will be free."

"Yes. In one way I am glad to have the chain lifted. It is good to be a free man, bound by no promises save your own."

"And your friend Paul—?"

"He has gone down to the Bohemian settlement; he has some old friends there."

Her fingers began to work nervously, and a fluttering paleness played around the lips that seemed to sink now and then, as if an undertow of fear drew them in toward her soul.

"Victor," with a quaver in her voice, "I ought to tell you; the doctor said to-day—"

He caught the fingers in his, cold and trembling as they were, with a sick, inward fear.

"He said that—father," stumbling a little over the old name, "might last a long while. Cases are not uncommon where one helpless as he is, has recovered partially. It may be years—"

"Well?" breaking her long pause.

"I wanted to say—that since your plans are all made, I believe that I can get along. There is considerable of the salary unpaid, and friends have been very kind."

"You don't think *that* of me?" His voice rising to a strained, hurt pitch. "You don't think that I would go away and leave you alone with him, dependent upon charity? Oh, mother! mother! This is a bitter punishment."

"No, I did not;" kissing her whole trust into the throbbing, fevered lips. "But I wanted you to feel quite free. My duty does not include yours," with a sad flutter of a smile.

"No. My duty is distinct. The man who cared for me in my helpless childhood, deserves a return in his adversity. I have been proud, cold, selfish; wrapped in dreams of my own advancement, and tempted of the devil in a manner that you could hardly understand. But my post is here until he dies;" clearing his throat. "I'll have all this foul, black ingratitude out of my veins!"

She saw, then, with a nameless terror of relief, that he accepted the position. She remembered a time when she had been ambitious to bring herself up to a pure and lofty standard, to cast off any habit that might seem to the man she loved like some faint profanation of vulgarity, or the touch of a poverty that might leave its mark; yet he, with his high-born, delicate impulses, with his proud descent which was like a king's lineage to him, the chivalric notions nurtured amid luxury and refinement, and all the higher appliances of beauty, art, literature, and wealth, had not scrupled to forswear himself when the time of temptation came. For how much would an old name and pure blood count? Did not God have another code by which to test men?

"But if there should come a time, when in the depths of your pain you should turn and hate me?" she cried with all the anguish of fear, hesitating to accept his sacrifice.

"That will never be. No, I am not such a brute as that."

"But if you had never known? After bearing the burden until my shoulders had become accustomed to it, why should God let it fall upon another, escaping from weak, irresponsible lips?"

"Your churchmen would say—to humble my pride;" with boyish bitterness. "But why has God let you suffer all these years, when you have been serving Him? Why should He let this man blight your innocent girlhood, and be prosperous and happy? Does He have anything to do with it?" almost fiercely. "There is a mystery about it that I am slow to understand."

She took his hand in hers, caressing it in her tender, silent

way, but her lips were dry and dumb. Ah, if she could have blotted it out; or, if he could have gone before this sad event had befallen her.

For she fancied that she would have been stronger alone, and that he, not knowing the secret, might have struggled up to bolder heights.

They had yet to learn the tragical contests that are going on continually between the strongest, and perhaps the highest impulses of the soul; and the chain of trivial circumstances that drifts it so far from the shore where it had meant to make a haven, tosses it about like some useless weed, and not seldom wearies out its struggles after a more satisfying existence. Every day some soul is wrecked, and casual observers glancing only at the placid current, wonder why.

Oh, God! Was there any hand stretched out to save them in the depths of their despair?

CHAPTER XI.

Back to the old life. Mr. Norcross had only smiled a little when the young man reconsidered his determination, believing it the result of his own sensible advice. Victor might have nursed his pride and gone elsewhere, there were other shops open to him; but his great wound had penetrated so deeply that these lesser thorns scarcely pricked him.

There was a great deal of sympathy expressed for Mr. Hurst. His brethren in the ministry paid Mrs. Hurst calls of condolence, and sighed over the helpless body of their co-laborer. It was one of the mysterious providences of God, whose ways were past finding out, and she was exhorted to faith, patience, and grace.

Every one hoped that it would be the means of bringing the young man to a sense of duty; a return to the fold. Surely this was a call which he would hardly refuse to heed.

He had his own struggles and inward monitions. A wild, eager grasping for the material light above him, that lured him on with so beguiling a ray, and yet evaded his outstretched hands. He meant to get out of this hard, narrow groove of poverty, since he was able to help himself, and institute a new order of things at home. He understood his own life better than these men who prated of lessons and warnings.

John Hurst improved slowly—if it could be called that. The heavy eyelids gained strength for a meaningless, unwinking stare, and the thin lips would occasionally move in unintelligible mutterings; breathing and eating went on with the monotony of a machine, the only links between him and the sentient, blossoming world without. Sometimes, in her dis-

tressful watching, Anah would fancy the distortion of the lips a smile, and the hard stare a look of recognition, as if the poor soul had been stirred by some gleam of intelligence common to humanity.

She took up her cross meekly, thinking that she could see in it a righteous retribution for the past years' discontent and lack of faith in God. For although we may believe in a system of rewards and punishments hereafter, it is so natural to apply them to this narrow existence as well. All her life had been one of reparation. For what? Because in the innocency of her girlhood, she had believed in the man who was a prince and a hero to her, had trusted him with the law, not made alike for all men as she had learned.

There was little cordiality between Victor and his fellow-workmen. Baxter had gravely counseled him in the beginning.

"You're going the wrong way. There's no use in a man making enemies when he might as well make friends."

"The friendship being of such a high order!" with a short, bitter laugh.

"There's as good men here as you are, Hurst! They don't like to see a youngster lording it over them, as if they weren't fit to speak to. I've known the men in a shop to strike when one hand became obnoxious."

"I don't interfere with them or ask any odds. All that Norcross demands, is that I shall do my work well. If he chooses to put a beer-drinking Englishman on the next forge, I can act my pleasure as to whether I'll be 'hail fellow' with him or not."

"They are more than half your own countrymen, when it comes to that," exclaimed Baxter indignantly.

"I can make friends or not, I suppose, as I like;" swinging his strong arm nearer the foreman, in a manner that would have been insolent if it had not been indifferent.

"You're too full of the new-fashioned quips and quirks,

Hurst," eyeing him with a shrewd under-meaning. "The world will not be any the better for your tinkering at it and trying to change things. You may as well start with the supposition that most of the men are as good, and honest, and well meaning as yourself, if they do drink a little beer or smoke short pipes."

"I haven't interfered with their pipes nor their rum. Let them drink, and smoke, and go to the devil by the road which suits them best. And if I choose to take some other road, I've the right."

Baxter studied the flushed and restless face. Curiously enough there was something about the young fellow that attracted while it repelled. Baxter, like most other men, felt called upon to preach to him. We turn evangelists easily when some one strays from our way of thinking.

"And with your father's life before you, Hurst,"—making a doubtful pause.

"My father's life? Well, what has it been? A great sacrifice at first; for I do believe he might have gained a competency, instead of starving soul and brain and body in the forlorn hope of the redemption of the world. And the reward of his labor bids fair to be a helpless old age. What do these people care, for whom he labored? They came and cried over him at first, and held up his good deeds. How many of them are remembered to-day? No; when you point me to an example, let it be a different one from that."

Baxter was silent. He knew what he meant in his soul, but he could not bring it to the right shape upon his lips.

"Or, perhaps you think it my duty to become a parson?" with his scornful, fiery look.

"I think you are taking the world at its wrong end, Hurst; and that you'll have to fight your way through, just as a man does who leaves the beaten track in the woods, and goes stumbling through bramble and underbrush, when he might

have had a clear path and bits of sunshine. And for a man who has to work—"

"Well?" raising himself to his full height, while his eyes flashed out steely gleams.

"It's not well for him to quarrel with his bread and butter."

With that the man walked away. He always had the worst of it in these little encounters with Hurst, and yet he held to a stubborn belief that he was right. He accepted the facts cheerily, that Victor kicked against. He had been born in such a groove in life, given a plain education, taught a trade, and at length gained a fair position. He was foreman here, with a salary of one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. He had a very comfortable cottage in a pleasant street, a thrifty wife who even now did a little dressmaking when her own work was pretty well finished. There were four healthy, rosy children, and Amos Baxter was a happy, contented man; read his paper at night with a clear conscience, and grumbled only at the taxes when the opposite party were in power. A commonplace man with a commonplace wife, who would live and die in this station, and never stir up the world trying to get out of it.

"For there must always be a producing class as well as a consuming class," was his bit of political economy.

So you may infer that Mrs. Baxter was not one of the hungry women of the new school, or her husband would hardly have been suffered to plod on, and feel that he was doing his best in the world.

He had a great antipathy to the restless moods of such men as Hurst.

"Why can't they be content with their station?" he would ask in his phlegmatic way.

Why? If a man is born with fine brain and nerves, with an eye for exquisite sights and sounds, and a soul that hungers after beauty in all its manifold forms, can he be content with the stone that is proffered him for bread? If he hears sounds

of deeper meaning in the air, and can translate the birds' clear carol, the drone of bees, and the hum of countless insects, mingled with the eternal pulse of the distant ocean, will you sting him with the scorpion of content? Rather let him fight his way out if he have the will and the stamina, and if he perish by the wayside, wash your hands clean, oh Priest and Levite, flinging the last drops over his grave, that the unquiet spirit may be laid.

With Victor's larger income, some changes had appeared in the little cottage. The floor was still uncarpeted, and the chairs and other ordinary appointments remained the same. But the napery was finer, the common glass was exchanged, the old, time-worn ware gave place to simple white china. There was always a bouquet at his corner, and a vase in each window. The little courtyard in front no longer depended on neighbors for voluntary offerings, but bloomed abundantly in choicest fragrance. Roses, from the palest tint to the most glowing velvety crimson; thrifty, healthy mignonette with its mass of cool greenery and uncomprehended bloom; choice geraniums, and spikes of tube-roses for late summer sweetness.

And Anah Hurst dared to make fugitive excursions to the lost land of her youth, led thither by her son's soul. How much beauty, and pleasure, and sweet comfort was it necessary to give up in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven? It had been a troubled question with her a long while. Now and then the old cloud crossed her brow.

"You don't think it wrong?" Victor would say, when he found her musing on the shady porch-bench, with the questioning look in her eyes.

"It is so delightful! I sit and watch their beauty, and wonder if they were made for a snare, when one ought to be thinking of human things instead: of the world lying in wickedness without, of the perishing souls that go up to judgment without a prayer."

"I think you pray for them all;" more softly than was his

wont. "Do you suppose God grudges us this bit of beauty, when He has sown so much broadcast in the world? You make Him narrow and cruel."

Then she would look at them still, with a mist in her soft eyes, and wonder, as many do, who bring their faith within the straitest bounds, what the Saviour meant when He enjoined His disciples to give up houses and lands, wife and children, and follow Him with scrip and staff. The man lying yonder, helpless as an infant, had done it, and where was his reward?

Forgotten already! Yes, it was too sadly true. A new man had taken his place; a man of loud pretensions, and a peculiar self-aggrandizement that you find in some natures. A man likely to reap what others had sown, and bring in his sheaves with much complacency; but who believed in good dinners as well. In a month he gained more credit than John Hurst had done in years. His clerical brethren began to make much of him, and wonder that they had not discovered poor brother Hurst's inefficiency before.

But the souls up in heaven, to whom he had preached as the Saviour did to the thief upon the cross, through many a weary midnight, what answered they? Is there not some divine law of compensation? Truly said St. Paul, "If the dead rise not again, we are of all men most miserable."

Victor, hearing some of these things, carefully kept them from his mother; chafing secretly at her reluctance to enjoy the good gifts of life while souls without were still in need. Her heart was so tender and pitiful to all in want, whether it came through their own improvidence, or more serious misfortunes.

But being shut out of the old world of labor, her heart, so long active, must have something on which to expend its energies and tenderness. For John Hurst, at present, there was nothing beyond purely physical wants. If reason came back to him for a few moments, he was more likely to babble of childhood's green fields than any later interest. Since her

son had allowed her to gain entrance within his sacred and secret world, she thought, prayed, and smiled over him, beginning to dream strange, wild dreams, and anon checking herself, and bringing out the old work-basket, for "the poor ye have always with you."

Paul Latour's disappointment had been deeper than one would have fancied from his volatile nature. He dropped into the little cottage now and then, and rather shocked Mrs. Hurst with his bits of free, daring philosophy that he flung up rocket-wise. Perhaps it was as well that Victor should not have such eyes to assist him in his first views of the world.

An encounter in a photographic gallery supplied him with part of the interest which his soul so craved, since it could not have nature to study.

Alfred Lowndes was working himself up to a small local reputation with little genius for a foundation, and much industry and actual truth. Now and then he translated some bit of wood and water, a few fallen scarlet-brown leaves, shrivelled by the October frosts, faded grasses that had once been rank, nodding their yellow heads on brown stems, with a late dragon-fly perched high a-top, a moss-grown stump with abundant lichens, and the straggling roots washed clean by the pebbly stream. The faithfulness in it would be good, but the higher and divine power called "inspiration," seldom racked his brains with torturing dreams of beauty.

But one afternoon Victor gained courage to blunder into a half-explanation.

Would Lowndes give him some lessons? He was quite able to pay for the trouble.

"So you've a fancy that way, eh? Well, it's hard work!" sighing like an old pilgrim.

"It would be a kind of play to me;" with an odd smile. What did Lowndes' limp, white hands know of hard work?

The artist gave a little inward humph of contempt at the conceit of the brawny machinist, who would be much more

at home amid bars of iron and steel than fine gradations of color.

Still, when it came to that, he could make the lessons very little trouble, and Alfred Lowndes' genius was not of the generous, prodigal type, neither was he rich enough to afford to despise money. One afternoon each week Victor spent in the little den partitioned off from the work and the reception-room, and as Lowndes had but few suggestions to make besides the merest business, to Victor it was a kind of dreamy holiday-time, when he could forget the world without.

This was another thing that fretted Baxter, who insisted strenuously upon steadiness.

"It gives a man a bad reputation, Hurst," he said, a good deal vexed. "What can you want of an afternoon every week?"

"That's my own affair;" his nerves stiffening as if he had some unseen enemy to beat back. "If I choose to lose the time it does not cost any one else a penny."

"But we're pretty busy now, and one likes to depend upon his man. It makes bad work."

And Baxter would have discharged him upon the spot, only he knew well that Hurst, with his lost time, did as much as any man in the shop, and did it well.

"What a pity that he can't be content!" glancing at him from a distance, and studying the lithe, strong figure. "And if he's ambitious he might have a place of his own, some day. If he hadn't been a parson's son—" but there the wide difference between Victor Hurst and his father puzzled the narrow brain.

So Victor stole off to the studio and spent the hours there that would go too fast, always too fast. There was so much drudgery to learn about colors that he used often to get discouraged; and somehow, the fineness of detail wearied him exceedingly. To potter for hours over some small turn of a tree, or a bit of shaggy bark browned and seamed by many

a storm, tried his patience sorely. Often he stayed until the last red ray of sunlight would drop out of the narrow window and all the air seem full of purple motes.

He learned something besides this paltry daubing, and about as useless. One day he was introduced to Miss Marcia Lowndes.

He had been brought in contact with very few women. Through boyhood he had shunned them, and the odd little talk with Sylvia Redmond was about the only episode of the kind in his life.

Miss Marcia Lowndes might have been "the fiction of twenty-five, founded upon the fact of forty." She and her brother were types of tolerably successful mediocrity. New England school teachers at first, they had, with Yankee thrift and perseverance, contrived to make their way. So, when Alfred Lowndes found a fair business opening at Weareham, he wrote for his sister, and they set up their Lares and Penates in the smoky town.

"I've made quite a hit here," he declared by way of welcoming her. "My method of finishing photographs takes wonderfully—it's quite new. Then, I've sold one picture."

The height of his ambition was to go abroad, and he seemed in a fair way of achieving this distinction.

As for Miss Lowndes, she had quite a position of her own. In the early days she had been a rabid disciple of phrenology, brushed her flossy-flaxen hair straight back from the rather high, narrow forehead, and prated of perceptives, reflectives, and brain power. Since then she had written a book and numerous essays for second-rate periodicals, strongly imbued with misty transcendentalism and weak dilutions of Carlyle, and followed Emerson's "inner impulses," according to her own light.

You could see that in her face; but now it was "framed in," as she would have expressed it, by the fluffy hair, whose silver threads were scarcely discernable from the original, the

brows and lashes being of the same indistinct color. Probably with the roundness and red and white of youth she had been pretty, but now her nose was sharp, her vague, wandering eyes of no particular color, and her chin, always too long for beauty, had not improved with the general angularity of years. There was about her a touch of fine ladyism, that rustled like a new silk gown; and when she looked at you through her gold-bowed glasses, and talked impressively of the inner centre, and the development of soul according to the higher laws of nature, you felt that she might indeed be a latter-day disciple.

Stumbling up the narrow stairs one day, Victor found her in the studio instead of his master. In the work-room, a tall, lanky boy was pottering with chemicals and washing paper. Business was rather dull just now, and customers seldom dropped in after the morning.

Miss Lowndes had taken quite an interest in this pupil of her brother's. On the whole, there was a trifle of romance about his history that went to prove her pet theory, that genius, like beauty, was no respecter of position, and seldom came at the beck of sordid gold.

He flushed at finding a woman in this "den," and stopped short.

"Really splendid," was her mental ejaculation. "A kind of Titan, with a Greek contour, and—and—the bright hair of those sunny islands bathed by the glowing sea. There certainly is the divine essence in his face."

"My brother was called away on some business. You are his pupil, Mr. Hurst, I presume?" and as she inclined her head graciously, the fluffy hair fell into her eyes. "He left a message on a card. How could I have been so careless?" bustling about, with her rather fussy motions. "Oh, here it is. And I must apologize; but I was *so* interested in these studies. I have a passionate love for all pertaining to art."

Victor flushed and took the card awkwardly.

"And you, too, are ascending the hill difficultly, as many of us have to, by slow and toilsome steps. But all true development, Mr. Hurst, must come from the inner centre. We see it in nature everywhere. Even the simple grain of corn teaches us this grand fact."

She paused, quite out of breath, and taking up her sandal-wood fan, began to fill the waves of air with pungent odor.

"And how long a grain of art lies dormant in the brain!" with a most benignant approval of his silence or her eloquence, which, it would have been hard to tell. "How slow the mysterious processes by which it is unfolded! Minerva sprang full-statured from the brain of a god, but we unfortunates of a later day have to develop according to circumstances,—often hard and unfavorable."

"Yes," Victor said, briefly, the washed-out eyes seeming to expect a reply.

"You have known the struggles of a longing, aspiring soul in its search for the true and the beautiful; you have watched for the divine inspiration through many a weary hour, happy to have the serene influence folded about you at last. To those who are not born blind and deaf, Mr. Hurst, she speaks in every leaf, in every waft of air from orient shores; and happy he who can prison her on canvas, or reproduce her in verse. I sometimes tell Alfred that I envy him. Yet, why should I not be content with my own gifts, except that human nature is insatiable!"

The fanning went on more vigorously. Victor began to hunt about the little room for his belongings. He could not waste his precious moments listening to this flighty nonsense.

"I have been looking over your studies. I suppose I ought not to have taken the liberty; but I am so extravagantly fond of art. This head of Tantalus is wonderfully fine!"

It was a rough sketch, done in crayon and chalk with a great deal of vigor.

Lowndes was rather in the habit of snubbing his pupil in these matters. He always took high pre-Raphaelitic ground.

"These things," with a sniff of disdain making his short nose positively stubby—"these things used to do very well, but people, or rather *taste*, has outgrown them, and asks for pure nature. The closer you can get to her the better, if you ever mean to do anything."

Which closeness meant fidelity to a hedge-bush, if it had not a line of beauty in it, or the lace on a child's apron.

Though Alfred Lowndes rather liked the prestige of being master, the improvement of his pupil was of but small moment to him. These strong, unhandsome faces, with their wordless rage, passion, and despair, never touched him, since prettiness was his aim, and not the grandeur of beauty; while the small prettiness of detail was what Victor Hurst would never be able to reproduce. His life-poem must be an epic, not a fireside ballad.

Her appreciation stirred him in spite of the silly rhodomontade that had gone before, so little comprehended by him that he hardly knew how to judge it.

"I liked it," he answered, timidly, yet with the honesty of his nature. "It seems as if more of my soul goes into such work."

Alfred had said before he went out, "The fellow has scarcely an atom of true genuis, but it pleases him to paint; and I suppose he would think it mean in me to refuse a helping hand."

When Miss Lowndes took up a hobby she was always very enthusiastic over it, and she possessed a more generous nature than her brother. Besides, she had a great passion for gathering little circles about her. With her lost years and faded face she could hardly hope for lovers; but foolish and flighty as she was, she did make friends, and occasionally admirers. She had seen many notabilities, and always turned her personal knowledge to a good account.

The manliness and physical power of Victor won her more than the power of his genius. He *was* handsome. The tall, symmetrical figure, the eyes that could flash so superbly, the perfect tints of health, and the rich, mellow voice pleased her woman's fancy. Studying him a little more closely, she saw that his foot was shapely, and his hand, not the brawny hand of a blacksmith. He certainly would be imposing in society. So in return for his wasted hour, she made him promise to come to Rose Cottage, as she called it.

"For I must have a little beauty, and this town is so exceedingly ugly. So I have made a little nest, and shall be glad to see you. You may meet some people whom you will like, for I always manage to surround myself with congenial spirits."

So fan, and laced-handkerchief, and the rustling manner floated down stairs with Miss Lowndes; and for once, instead of painting, Victor Hurst fell into a reverie.

CHAPTER XII.

Two or three dainty, delicate notes came to Victor Hurst before he could summon sufficient resolution to accept an invitation for any special purpose. He had strolled down to Rose Cottage twice; the first time, hearing gay voices, he had not ventured in, and the second, Miss Lowndes sat alone in the vine-wreathed porch.

She sprang up with a girl's eagerness. "So glad, so delighted to see him. Why had he not come to her little reunion? For, indeed, they were not grand enough to be called parties."

He stammered out some excuse—his father having been worse than usual.

"How very sad!" and Miss Lowndes sighed.

He was awkward and ill at ease; and half wished he had not ventured.

"What are you doing now?" Perhaps Miss Lowndes' social success was partly due to the fact that she always led her guests to talk of themselves instead of burdening them with her pains and anxieties.

"Nothing;" in his blunt, brief way. "I sometimes think that perhaps I have made a mistake. There is no question about your brother having a genius for painting, Miss Lowndes?"

He seemed to ask it in a humble, eager fashion. In his mind he was studying out his own problem.

"No, I should think not;" with a pleased little laugh, rather thin and hysterical. "You heard, of course, that he had sold another picture? And he has two orders for out-of-door photographic views that will be very profitable."

"He is in luck."

Victor Hurst tried to crowd down the demon of envy, rising in his breast. He was very human, and no angelic hero.

"Yes. Dear Alfred! He deserves it, though: he has worked very hard. And I may tell you as a secret—please don't mention it to him—that we are quite certain to go abroad in the fall."

Victor made an effort to draw his breath regularly.

"And you—?"

"Oh, I shall go, of course. To tell the truth, I have been waiting for him. It has been the great ambition of my life, Mr. Hurst, to see Rome, the once mighty queen of nations; the Alps; Switzerland, with its pellucid lakes, and the blue Mediterranean; to spend long days in picture-galleries, and hunting over old ruins—"

She gave a gasp for breath—she always did when she talked rapidly.

"I shall write a book of travels, and probably correspond for several papers while I am gone. There is so much to see abroad,—and when one has a soul easily moved by these grand touches of beauty, the enthusiasm is little less than inspiration."

How these two people seemed to prosper and advance. Everything flowed in to them.

"It is the one thing you need, Mr. Hurst. When it comes to that, no one's education is really finished until he has lived abroad. But you are so devoted to your dear father."

Victor thought of the narrow chance that had intervened.

"As a people, we are too new and crude. We need toning down, softening, refining; and the leisure of foreign lands gives us opportunity for this. But what were we talking of—oh, my brother's genius."

She made another long detour over the hills and vales of fancy, while Victor was thinking in his plain, matter-of-fact way, whether he had the constituent elements of success within his soul, and if so, how they were to be worked out. Day by

day he was awakening to the fact that another had begun life wrongly for him. He could never find happiness nor content in the shop yonder; and yet, what if he made a more fatal mistake himself? He and Alfred Lowndes were so very dissimilar; if one had genius, the other must be some distance from it.

And what was he to do then? Give up his plans, his love?

She flattered and soothed, after the fashion of shallow, and rather tender-hearted women, and he returned home in a better humor with himself, promising to attend her next reunion.

Fortunately for his self-complacency, Alfred was called away; for although there was an outward friendliness between the two, some fine, inexplicable difference would keep them from being even ordinarily sympathetic.

Victor was rather glad to please Miss Lowndes. He found her in white, with an abundance of flying ends of ribbon, and hair dropping in her pale eyes with every motion; but she welcomed him warmly, and soon made him feel at home.

Rose Cottage abounded in small shams, as cheap beauty is ever apt to do; and yet, why grumble since it has become the fashion to preach economy and beauty together. If the vases were not Bohemian and Malachite, the flowers looked prettily in them, and the different colors showed cheerfully in the lamp-light. What mattered the cheap Brussels under foot, the plain muslin curtains tied back with ribbon, and many another thing that Miss Lowndes had arranged in the plenitude of her complacency? Why destroy all these illusions with the stern voice of reality, that decrees your lace shall be of the best or none at all, your glass and china fine, or else no friends shall be invited to gaze upon it?

In spite of being a stranger, Victor did enjoy the evening. The guests, like the appointments, were not of the highest order, but they had a certain refinement and cultivation, very fascinating to him who could only gauge them by the simple events of his own life, and the still lower round in which his destiny had been cast. Men who discussed Goethe and Schiller, Kant

and Swedenborg, and Shlegel, who had stories to tell of Paris salons, or Roman studios, or who, coming nearer home, touched upon abstract theories, or vital questions that roused him to a sense of new life, and made him hate more than ever to drone out his days in a workshop. Not from any purely personal sense of pride, but a deeper craving for the spiritual existence that so mocked him with airy, delicate visions.

The women were not so entertaining to him, their round of subjects being much narrower, and he was quite delighted to steal away to a corner where two pale, gaunt-eyed men were discussing the old problem of social equality. Was it strange that he should drink in heresies for truth?

But how to get out of the groove was what puzzled him. What could he do but the one thing, money being an absolute necessity!

And so his mother saw him growing moody and restless again. The trees and flowers, bits of rock and stream, and the puzzle of light and shade lost its charm. He could make nothing look like the grand picture out of doors. Beside that, the daubing was vile, miserable stuff.

Yet to give it up seemed like relinquishing all that made life endurable. To be thrust down to that bare, bald, bread-and-butter existence, with its monotonous labor from morning till night—did God ask it of any human soul? Was it not rather some horrible cruelty of man, some device to grind and torture his neighbor when he had a chance?

He went down the river a fortnight afterward, as Miss Lowndes' escort to a grand musical entertainment in one of the loveliest groves in the surrounding country. An out-door concert with the freedom of a picnic attached. He had been fighting his own soul so hardly of late that he felt pushed to the last gasp, and was glad of a little rest.

Who would have guessed it from his handsome face, where the moodiness left only the stamp of a haughty spirit? Miss

Lowndes entertained him in her usual weak, effusive style, but he had lost interest in Wilhelm Meister, and for his soul could not have told what the distinctive features of a Claude painting were, and wherein it differed from the Dutch masters.

There was music in abundance. Paul Latour had stirred his soul with a single voice ; to-day, this orchestra trailing the winding melody of French horn, flute, and viol, with all the blare of noisier instruments until the fragrant woodland air was one pulsating sea of melody, never roused him at all.

Leaving the women to their gossip and criticisms, he stole away to a thicket and threw himself on a mossy bank. From this little loop-hole he watched the gay crowd surging to and fro, for now the orchestra had disbanded for a brief while. The brilliant panorama of handsome women, for in this summer glamor of leafy shade and sifting sunshine, hair, and cheek, and eye caught a softened splendor.

Two men approached slowly. The taller of the two was a fine, portly man, of aristocratic bearing, and a face still handsome in spite of the marks of good living and worldliness. Victor shut his eyes with a haunting pain, as if he must remember where he had seen it before. The turn of the head, the peculiar and curious grace of a fine manner, and even the smile seemed strangely familiar.

The other was smaller and slighter, stooped a trifle and had the serious air of a scholar, and the careless dress of one who studied the world and its ways but little, and heeded them less yet. A sweet, pleasant countenance, though not one that impressed you strongly at first.

"What foolishness, Milnor," the taller exclaimed with a careless laugh. "Let me drive you over to see Mrs. Gilliat instead. I should think by this time you had enough of unfortunate proteges to let unfledged geniuses alone."

Victor caught the name—Gilliat. And then there rushed over him the remembrance of a night a year ago—the episode he had half-forgotten. Had this name any connection with it?

"I promised to see him, at least."

"To please a foolish woman. Milnor, you hardly improve with age," giving a gay, genial laugh, in which there could not be a thought of offence. "You are as famous a radical as ever."

"And you are a born aristocrat."

Mr. Gilliat bowed courteously; princely, it seemed to Victor Hurst. There was a fascination in watching the man.

"I plead guilty to the charge, but you cannot accuse me of having grafted foreign manners on native birth."

"No, you had it always, as a boy, I recollect. But the world changes a little, Gilliat."

"Does it?" with a good-humored smile. "For the worse I think. Our race of noblemen and ladies is dying out. Coarse braggarts, with loud voices and manners that smack of trade, are taking the place of the former, and blatant women, sharp and shrill, prate of rights and wrongs and discuss subjects in market-places that would not have been named among them twenty years ago."

"You judge from a few isolated cases, Gilliat. I think, in spite of the great cry, that our women are as noble as ever. That they prove themselves competent to fill high places is not to their disfavor, in my view."

"There may be a few instances where they prove themselves competent, but these are women of birth and breeding. But this leaven coming up from the lower orders—"

"Will leaven the whole lump. Is that what you are afraid of? Let it come, I say. Let us have the strength, the endurance, the vigor and health with the refinement of what you call high birth. What is it after all but an accident?"

"More than that, my friend. It is a life of culture, leisure, surroundings that appeal to the noblest and most delicate emotions of the human soul, a freedom from wearing cares that debase the brain and render it coarse, stolid, from the gross heat that makes the blood low and sluggish in a man's veins.

And you can never raise your 'people' so high but that some of the old desires will crop out."

"We have had many noble men, from the people, as you call them. Poets, painters, statesmen, wise and efficient rulers."

"And in how many cases can you trace the ambition back to this birth that you so decry, poverty being the accident?"

"Well then, let us make a bridge for these brave souls who even dare to breast the broad stream of fate. Give them a helping hand."

Gilliat shrugged his shoulders with infinite grace, and a mocking smile played around his lips.

"For the few worthy you help—who? The scum and refuse, the men and women who have their birthright for shops and factories. It is a great mistake, Milnor, that men like you with fine instincts think their duty lies in bringing up these masses; a mistake that you sensible reformers will one day rue bitterly. Look how our country is flooded now. Every periodical teems with French socialism; or worse, the right of the lowest and vilest to cry down the noble and refined, the right of the laborer to dictate to his employer, the servant to his master. And yet you insist upon taking men out of shops, making miserable daubs or maudlin poets of them. They turn and rend you, of course."

Milnor smiled carelessly. Years ago he and Gilliat had sat over their wine and discussed the same subject, yet through it all they had preserved a peculiar friendship.

"I have not been rent very often," with an odd and rather meaning intonation.

"Not personally, perhaps. Yet every year the disaffection grows wider. It seems to me that all persons having the good of society at heart, would join hands in preserving order, in keeping the distinction clearly marked. There *must* be two classes;" and a little frown marked the broad, indolent looking brow.

"Never fear; there will be dozens of classes while the world stands."

"That is just the difficulty — no one in his right place."

"And if I can help some poor soul, astray by force of circumstances, to find *his* right place, I shall still consider it my duty;" with a kind of graceful persistence.

"Forgetting your old friends thereby?"

"Not forgetting them. You know me better than that."

"Indeed I do. Forgive me for longing to convert you from the error of your ways. Look at it in a sensible light, Milnor. When a poor man is content with his station, for God's sake let him remain there. He will be as happy with his wife and children, his simple wants and pleasures. When you take him out of his sphere you give him a hundred crude, impossible desires, heart-burnings, envyings, strifes. You overtask an already wearied brain, and the result is a miserable failure, a man ashamed to work, and incapable, yes, really incapable of anything higher in the truest sense. It takes generations of culture and refinement to make *men.*"

Milnor answered with a quaint smile. He and his friend had gone over this ground so often in the old days.

"Come, leave the young genius to work out his own salvation. If there is the true ring to his gold you will hear of it sometime. Mrs. Gilliat will be delighted to see you—you have not met her since we were abroad. Mrs. Redmond is with her—you remember Margaret Randolph, surely?"

"Yes;" absently, as if there were some old memory connected with it. "Redmond is dead, I have understood."

"Yes, long ago. It was a marriage little to the old man's mind. He never forgave Margaret cordially, until after Redmond's death. That occurred North, I believe."

"So your people of blue blood do go astray sometimes?" with a peculiar smile.

"Redmond's family were well enough," rather testily,

"But his father had run through with most of the property, and Margaret might have done better."

"When do you go?" Milnor drew his watch out slowly and glanced at it.

"In about half an hour. I brought Miss Redmond over with us, she had a great fancy to see the crowd. You will find her more entertaining than your genius, I dare say; especially if he is a protege of that foolish Miss Lowndes."

Victor Hurst had lain there listening to the soft flow of talk as he listened to the thrush's warble in the clump of young cedars, or the flow of the river where it fretted against a huge boulder. There was in it no confidence that need trouble his conscience, though the arguments had stung him now and then, but only as the prick of a gnat. But to hear Miss Lowndes mentioned—

"I will compromise with you Gilliat;" and Milnor started up. "I will see if the young man can be found within the next half hour. It cannot make much difference, as I shall be in Weareham in the course of a few weeks. I can see him there."

Victor gnawed the scarlet lip, quivering with the heat of sudden passion, and a frown knotted the fair brow. So Miss Lowndes had been interesting this delicate, fastidious man in *his* behalf, yet a few words from Gilliat had turned the current.

He leaned back on his mossy pillow, looking dully up through the green breaks between him and the sky, where the grains of sunlight were sifted through, and yet he saw nothing. The slow, odorous air paused to play among his bright locks, but he felt no grateful coolness, only proud, reckless passion-heats. He experienced a strange and unaccountable antipathy to the very name of Gilliat, and he would take nothing from the man's friend.

"Truant!" Miss Lowndes exclaimed, tapping his arm with her fan when he sauntered into the little group nearly an hour later, "where have you lingered? A golden opportunity might

have dropped into your life, if you had but been here. I am displeased with you."

"And I sorry to have offended—that is all. As for opportunities—"

"No, you shall not rail. Your face is full of lofty contempt, but if you *had* seen Mr. Milnor. He is a very prince among men, and I could not resist telling him your story. We sought for you everywhere,—he was *so* interested. And at last he had to leave, he had promised to go with a friend."

"Perhaps it is as well. I should hardly be able to sustain the interest you have created."

There was a sharpness in his voice that fell unpleasantly upon Miss Lowndes' ear. She, woman-like, desired to have her favors and generous offers appreciated, and she had taken some pains to place the young man in his best light. Not understanding the current which vexed and tormented his soul, she could not make allowance.

She prided herself upon her penetration. It was her boast among her friends that she only needed to see a person once or twice to gauge his or her capabilities; and, like all hasty verdicts, hers were shallow and unreasoning. Still, circumstances proved her right now and then, giving her more faith in herself.

"You would be fortunate in making such a friend," and her voice went up to a thin, shrill intonation, showing that she was not pleased. But he was in no mood to heed it.

"I believe I am not one of the fortunate kind," dryly.

"Mr. Milnor is a man of means, and if he took a fancy to a person, or believed him really capable," worthy, she meant to say, but the lowering cloud in his face prevented, for Miss Lowndes could only be spiteful, not courageous, and just here she did not dare, so she smoothed it over adroitly, "he would do a great deal. I know of several whom he has helped educate."

He was in no mood for obligation just then; even her foolish patronage irked him. And that she should have begged assistance for him!

So he vexed her with his ungraciousness. The music lost its charm, and the endless rambling around became tiresome. He was glad to have the day over at last, and find himself just after sunset, walking up through the little garden, full of fragrant bloom.

His mother met him at the porch. A strange, lowly light shone in her tranquil face, as if in her soul the sun had not gone down.

"Have you had a pleasant day?" clasping the hot, throbbing palm in hers, and looking through the poor, thin smile, to the discontent beyond, a little pained and startled.

"No! but it was my fault. I sometimes think I had better go back to the shop and stay there. I am morose, unsocial, full of whims and fancies, and the shallow talk of the women bores me intolerably."

Something beyond that, she saw. How had he come by this sore, over-sensitive soul, that was so easily jostled about right and left? And not being able to solve that, she said, softly—

"He is better: clothed in his right mind, and remembers a good deal of the past. And he has asked for you."

Victor glanced at her with searching eyes.

"Our secret is still in our own hands," she continued, with a great tremble in her voice.

"There let it remain;" and stooping, he kissed her, trying to thrust the foul, hungry discontent out of sight. For, until his duty came to an end here, he had no right to aught beyond.

"Will you see him?"

"Yes."

The room was in a flush of golden and purple twilight. John Hurst lay there with a face full of childlike content,

though the expression seemed to waver a little, like a dying flame groping among ashes for some sustenance. Yet to the eyes had returned a faint glow of the spiritual, of softer light than had shone in them for many a day; a kind of rest and satisfaction, as if, having seen heaven opened, he was content to feast by faith, for the present. In place of the grayness had come a pure transparency to the wrinkled skin, and the blue-veined, bony hands were soft as an infant's.

He glanced up wistfully as Victor entered. The young man walked straight to the bedside. Whatever of vexation and wounded pride had tossed and tried him sorely was not visible now.

"Father," softly, taking the withered hand.

"My son." The voice was vague and tremulous, as if not quite certain of its own sound. "It has been a long while—"

"But you are better now," soothingly.

"Yes—only," with a look of piteous, entreating pathos, "I shall never be well again, never. God's hand has been laid heavily upon me. In my old age He has taken health and strength, and left me helplessness. Wherein have I so offended Him?"

"It is not that, I think," longing to comfort, and yet feeling the utter emptiness of soul which comes of unbelief.

"Yet He has left me something out of the wreck," glancing at his wife, who stood by the window opposite, the faint light making an aureola on the top of her soft hair.

"And a son as well."

Victor knelt by the bedside. The trembling hands were folded over his head.

"A son," the fluttering voice said. "A son. Thank Him, my soul."

And then Victor knew what manner of doubt had been wandering through the feeble mind.

His mother wiped away a few stray tears, and breathed a little prayer of thankfulness.

CHAPTER XIII.

"It is better to tell the truth, Miss Lowndes, therefore candor compels me to state that I see no real evidence of genius in the works of your friend. They are faulty in design, weak in execution, and lack even a nice eye for detail. A man must do one of two things—either copy nature with rare fidelity, or branch boldly out in untried ways and present the weird and strange to us with such force that we are compelled to believe in his power, even against our will, sometimes."

Mr. Milnor had been inspecting the portfolio with scholarly eyes, trained by fine habits of thought, study, and experience. With all this he was a very merciful critic wherever he saw a shadow of merit, as Miss Lowndes well knew.

"But he is so young yet, and has studied such a very little. His best sketches are not here. He has several heads that I think are—are—"

"Rubbish! as I've said all along," interrupted Alfred, impatiently. "He has done some rough things that may possibly indicate a kind of brutal strength, but not that out of which artists are made."

Alfred Lowndes had risen immensely in his own estimation in the course of the last ten days; and it had come from a trifle heretofore rather discouraging. A picture of his, pretty enough so far as neatness, order, and naturalness went, had been put in chromo without attracting very much attention for the past three months, and suddenly blazed into notoriety. Orders were pouring in, and for a few days his studio had been thronged. In the excitement his old pictures had been disposed of advantageously. Then a friend of his, lately come

into possession of a moderate legacy, had proposed to buy out the place and set up photography himself.

Whatever may have been the faults of "a Summer Afternoon," in oil, it made a charming chromo. The vague suggestive coolness happened to touch some critic's heart on a fiery August day, and the plodding fellow, with whom perseverance was the best virtue, took a long stride up the steep hill of fame. But, instead of being generous, he looked disdainfully down on his struggling fellow-mortals.

"I'm sure, Alfred—"

"My sister, like women in general, took a great fancy to him on account of his handsome face, though I never could see the beauty of mere animalism."

"It wasn't that, though you *will* admit at last that he is handsome," rather triumphantly.

"If Greek brigands of the most impossible type were in my line, I should ask him to sit."

Milnor laughed. He had done one or two small favors for Miss Lowndes in years gone by, and her gratitude being of the profuse and sentimental order, she had never forgotten it. He was one of those sweet-humored, sympathetic men who always look at a person on his or her best side, and manage to see virtues where the rest of the world are blind. So, to make up for Miss Lowndes' great disappointment, he had promised to visit her brother's studio, inventing some business on the spur of the moment to call him to Weareham.

"How did you first meet with this hero of yours?" and he looked from one to the other.

"He used to come in and study the pictures. I'll give the fellow credit for good taste, and a love for art; but that isn't everything."

"No."

"And then he begged me to give him a few lessons. He's had one a week; but even now he can hardly tell one color from another."

"It's such a little while. Look how long you were, Alfred, before you painted anything."

"It is not much, but he has been practising a long while, it seems, and he can't even make a correct outline. Then he has no patience."

For now Alfred Lowndes, after the fashion of many others in success, would rather push down than help up the weak, clinging steps. But he never had been very enthusiastic over his pupil.

"You mentioned, I think, that he was employed at—something?"

"He is a machinist," said Lowndes, coarsely; "he knows more about welding steel than mixing colors."

"But I'm sure that ought not to be used to his disadvantage," Miss Lowndes remarked, pathetically. "It shows that there is something in the man's soul, when he desires to leave behind the distasteful life."

"Simply because it is distasteful?" queried Mr. Milnor. "There is a good deal of morbid theorizing on this subject now-a-days."

"The man is a good mechanic and can earn his four dollars a day. I've seen the time when I'd been glad to get it. I shall tell him when he comes to-morrow that painting, clearly, is not his vocation."

"I should advise him to pursue some other walk in life," Milnor rejoined, slowly. "What about his education? His father was a clergyman, I think you said?"

"A kind of missionary to the lower orders," with as much disgust as Alfred Lowndes could put in a tone. "I guess he had not much chance for education."

Foolish and pretentious as Marcia Lowndes was, there was much more real delicacy in her than in her brother; but perhaps they both seemed coarse and commonplace, by comparison, with the circle out of which Milnor chose his acquaintances, or even his protégés. And now he thought of this poor clergy-

man's son, too indolent perhaps to study, but clinging to a false and sickly ambition. Better leave him in his place, as Gilliat had said.

"I believe you are right, Mr. Lowndes; I do not think the man will ever make an artist."

"You see, Marcia," nodding his head triumphantly.

Marcia was utterly humiliated. She would not have taken her rebuff so meekly but that she had a growing consciousness that her brother was fast merging into a great man, and instead of being the leading spirit, she must drop into the secondary place provided for all women when their work is done. He would want little advice, or counsel, or encouragement from her, since his world had grown so much larger. And the poor woman sighed.

But Mr. Milnor tried to comfort her by walking home with her and partaking of some cake and currant wine. She hated to give up her protégé, but Mr. Milnor placed it in a strong, sensible light.

"He may never be able to do anything really worth the effort, and it will only add another to the list of dissatisfied people, with whom the world already teems. I think your brother is right, Miss Lowndes."

If she only dared she would like to have said: "He has more real genius than Alfred;" but she was afraid to go against the world's opinion.

Mr. Milnor was puzzling his brains over a problem he could not solve satisfactorily: how had these two people, with a very small modicum of talent in the beginning, succeeded in gaining such a foothold in the world's esteem? And so he lost sight of Victor Hurst altogether.

Alfred Lowndes was well primed for his opinion the next day. Victor listened attentively.

"I had decided the case for myself, Mr. Lowndes," he replied, quietly, quite in contrast with the other's pompous manner. "I have not the genius for a painter. Still, I

do not regret the practice. I have learned some useful lessons."

He gathered the outlines and sketches, and replaced them in his portfolio, scarcely appearing surprised or disappointed.

"The fellow has no nerves at all, no sensitiveness," thought Alfred Lowndes, who looked for an outburst.

"And yourself—do you feel amply repaid for your trouble?"

"Why—yes," in slow amaze.

"Then all obligation is ended. Remember me kindly to your sister."

"You'll drop in before we go?" with sudden cordiality. "My sister will want to say good-bye. We shall leave for New York in about a fortnight."

"If it is possible."

So they bade each other farewell in a courteous manner. Victor's self-control never relaxed as he walked down the street. He understood his place now with a desperate, wronged feeling. And yet his aim had been good and high. To raise himself to the level of refinement and culture for which his soul longed, for which he might be fitted so easily, it seemed to him.

But there he was in the gulf, with the curse of manual labor upon him, the brand of a slave. Ah, no wonder the old Romans were proud and esteemed their blood sacred. Society said—because this man holding a father's place read your young life wrongly, mistook the germs of a noble ambition for foolish pride, and stained your hands with toil, there you must stay. Norcross, Baxter, that clean-blooded aristocrat Gilliat, and even these narrow-brained Lowndeses, concur in the same thing. Stay where you are, no matter how distasteful it may be. Crush out those aspirations—you have no business with them. Money and leisure only can afford them.

He took the pictures up to his room and thrust them into

an old chest stored with rubbish. Some day he would make a bonfire of them, but he was too sad and sore now, and for his mother's sake he must keep brave. But he said that evening—

"Mr. Lowndes and his sister are going abroad next month."

Anah Hurst started in secret dismay.

"He has been very successful with a picture. I suppose he *has* genius. It is making itself felt and appreciated."

"And you—?" with a kind of agonized apprehension.

"I shall rest awhile."

But his tone could not deceive her. She came over to his side and placed her hand nervously upon his shoulder.

"You have given up all, Victor," with a faltering strand in the sad voice.

"Not *all*, but *that*. Nay," taking the hand with which she was wont to shade her eyes lest the tears might spring too quickly, "I have convinced myself that I had no gift for it. So let it go."

There was a fierce pang at her heart, a thousand tortures in one, keener because she could not bear them all for her child. And with it a touch of superstition—she always bethought herself of some Scriptural parallel, and now the plagues of Pharaoh floated through her brain. Was it because she did not let her bondman go out of the land of Egypt?

Victor felt as if he had been worsted in the battle, pushed to the wall without a fair chance. In the depths of his soul there was as much genius as in Alfred Lowndes' narrow, conceited brain. But if he could not give it a voice?

Was there nothing for a man to do in the world except work and eat? Why had he been born, then, with this restless, hungry soul? Did God give these higher instincts for some wise purpose, not manifest in his case? or was the whole theory some far-fetched interpretation of the schoolmen to keep the world in order? since in the case of poverty they were to be stamped out, or considered the result of sickly sentimentalism.

The men who did not understand the kind of battle he had been fighting, watched him with suspicious eyes, resolving at last to make him take sides. If he was above them, let him find his higher level.

Two or three of them stopped him one evening. Connor was spokesman.

"Don't b'long to the Union, Hurst?" glancing furtively from under the shaggy brows.

"The Union?" vaguely.

"Trades, you know."

"No."

Victor Hurst felt that there was a radical difference between himself and this man. Would he, when he had worked thirty years, be that stolid and blear-eyed?

"What'll you do about it? All in this shop are on the right side. There's a talk of cuttin' down wages."

For any principle involved, Victor Hurst would have let them go. But the subject of wages came nearer home. If a workman had no right to raise himself in the social scale, he *had* a right to make all the money he could.

This group of men had taken what they termed his "airs" long enough, they thought. An apprentice only a few months ago, why should he put on a dignity and stateliness that they would hardly have tolerated in Baxter? The main idea was to get him out of the shop.

Fate had sent him over to this side of the question, which, like many important matters, was settled more by existing circumstances than principle, or even desire. He disliked everything connected with this sphere of life as strongly as on the day of his first outbreak; but then he thought he had only to take one decisive step out of it,—now he saw the many fine, strong chains that bound him hand and foot.

"I'm on the side of the wages," he said, briefly. "If Unions serve to keep them up—"

"We'd never got what we have without 'em," one of the

group made answer. "Every man oughter stick to his side, I say."

"And my side is the trade," with a bitter, derisive smile.

The men glanced at each other. The manner was not cordial, but the matter, if it went for them, was hardly to be disputed.

"You're on the trade's side?" cautiously, eyeing him with a furtive gleam of suspicion.

"Yes!" with a sharp ring in the voice, as if by that he hammered some delicate longing out of sight into a thousand fragments. "What do you want of me? Where shall I join?"

Connor was completely taken aback. Not being able to read the man's soul in the clear-cut, scornful face, he laid his brawny hand on Hurst's shoulder.

"Good grit at the last!" in sudden admiration. "I've been a little afeard o' you, youngster. Boys now-a-days take such high and mighty notions in their heads; and knowing that a little of the parson's blood was in your veins—"

"Parson never was proud."

"No matter about my blood," with a bright, scarlet spot on each cheek, and a quiver of the lip that their dull eyes could not discern. "If you want my hand on the union, there it is."

He had been thrust over the narrow boundary, he said to himself, and fate forced him into the step. These men always made a great outcry about their wives and children starving. He had a helpless father.

"Good for you, Hurst. I wouldn't hardly a' believed it; and you such a fine gentleman, like."

Victor experienced a qualm of disgust, and an almost irrepressible desire to shake off the contact of those grimy fingers. Were his own any better?

"When and where do you hold your meeting?"

"There'll be one to-morrow night—Croft's Hall."

"I know the place. I will be there."

The men stood and gazed after him as he strode down the street.

"You didn't get him out, Connor," with a rather irritating laugh.

Connor rubbed his eyes in amazement. What inexplicable change had come over the fellow?

"He's a chap that's hard to understand," shaking his head in a puzzled manner. "Now I'd a' said he'd be just the one to flare up and make a row. He's game, though, when you come to that. Carries it in his walk."

"And tricky, too, maybe."

"We'll see."

Opinion ran so high that two or three bets were made. Victor settled all doubts by appearing promptly, paying his initiation fee, and subscribing to the rules and regulations. Then he listened to a lengthy and rather disorderly discussion upon the necessity of keeping up wages, the rights of workmen, and a kind of confused jumble that he could not render at all intelligible to his senses or judgment. One thing only he felt —he was committed to this side, and if he ever struck any blow, it would be against his oppressor as well as theirs—the tyrant wealth,—capital they termed it.

To a great, hungry, untrained soul, some excitement was necessary. He had not the stimulus of intellectual life, and the lower estate was little to his taste. As a gentleman, he might have luxuriated upon elegant wines; but the low drinking and gambling-saloons were abominations. There were reading-rooms and libraries, one on the religious order, which he at this period deliberately eschewed. He had not made up his mind fully upon the subject, and until he did, with the unreason of youth, he would not allow himself to be biased in its favor. It was well enough, perhaps, and yet, wherein had his father been the gainer? Old, helpless, poor, and neglected, save by the few to whom he had endeared himself in some

great strait like that of death. Where was the love and tenderness of Christianity?

It is so easy to doubt—to rail. When Victor Hurst began to look about him and see that it was not truth which always succeeded, but rather falsehood; that the purple, fine linen, and ease often passed through the world unscathed, while honest poverty was the Lazarus at the gate, refused even the crumbs in many instances, despised, and thrust out to perish or to sin. And then came the appalling fact that it was the poor who filled the jails and almshouses, the poor from wretched homes that thronged the vile resorts and drank poisonous liquors.

There were older and wiser men who beat their heads against the same rock—wages. Victor, hearing the outcry, joined it with an intemperate zeal. But here were all the statistics. Rents, provision, clothes, were high, and now, in the winter, was added the increased price of fuel. In the face of this, employers talked of reducing wages.

There was another side to the story. Of improvidence Victor Hurst knew but little: Mrs. Hurst had been a thrifty manager all her life, from the day her father had handed his small income, that ended with his death, over into her keeping. She had managed on the missionary's scanty salary, and now Victor's money was expended as frugally. But there had been many sacrifices and small economies that those with fewer nice instincts would have been hardly willing to try. The extravagant Sunday meal—the poor man's holiday feast; the frequent sicknesses, when ignorant mothers, knowing nothing concerning the bodies they had given their children, ran in frantic haste for the nearest doctor, and lavished their husbands' money on expensive drugs; the general careless management, indolence, and waste, could hardly be taken into account by so young and inexperienced a philosopher. He was caught by the old cry—money, education, pleasant and popular places of resort, more leisure, and the general lifting up of this lower stratum of society.

That there are many wrongs, one must admit. But while men prefer to sip bad whiskey, to smoke until their brains are stupefied, and amuse themselves with greasy bits of painted pasteboard, or rehearse coarse stories, while opposite, the reading-room languishes, it is not merely from lack of opportunity, but something deeper underlying it all, that not money alone can cure. If men and women in high places ever come to understand the deeper significance of the Saviour's new commandment; but hearts grow weary after a trial of eighteen hundred years.

The autumn was raw and cold, with frequent storms, and winter set in early. As if in some spirit of secret unison with the depression of nature, trade began to languish, and with scarcity of work came the dreaded decrease in wages.

But the Unions in Weareham were strong and powerful, as in the most of purely manufacturing towns. There were strikes, and processions, and violent harangues in halls and market-places, to say nothing of beer-shops, always the loudest mouthed. Idle men hung at the corners, thoughtful men walked slowly about studying the pavement and their own apprehensions, while the restless and discontented added their mite to the general dissatisfaction.

Here, as in many other places, the trades had conquered, and were thereby strengthened and elated. But this was an inauspicious season. Orders were falling off, employers felt the necessity of economy and retrenchment, and, as usual, began it with their men.

Oddly enough, Victor Hurst became a leader in the disaffection. His own fancied wrongs still rankled in his soul, and the vengeful determination to strike blow for blow was strong within him. One and another had found his place for him; so he would take it now, and from this standing-point make them feel the power of the man they were so ready to discard from their ranks.

He was a fluent and fiery speaker, the thing to take with

unreasoning masses. He dealt powerful thrusts right and left, exhorted the men to stand to their principles, to resist these high-handed outrages on human rights. Let the rich make sacrifices as well. Did they give up their horses and carriages, their costly dinners and expensive wines, their balls and operas, their elegant houses, and silks and diamonds? Rather they ground it out of the poor man. It was he who starved and felt the pinching blasts beside fireless hearths. It was his wife and children who went clothed in rags, while the others flaunted in satin and velvets.

But when actual starvation came, when the funds of associations reached the lowest ebb, when shops were closed and employers still stood firm, some of these men with wives and children studied over the old adage, and began to think "half a loaf better than none." Capital had the advantage this time, and labor crouched for the next blow, when its stomach was fuller.

CHAPTER XIV.

So one night Victor Hurst sat by the fire, a beaten, miserable, discouraged man. All his fine philosophies about raising his brethren had come to an ignoble end.

Worse than that for him. When Norcoss opened his works again, in the latter part of January, he said to his foreman, throwing down a printed list—

"There are the prices of this place. If any man chooses to work for that, I'll take him on; and I guess some will be starved to it. Any how, there are a few new hands from the neighboring towns to begin with. They will find that we are not to be overruled by their cheap and noisy fustian. But there are several exceptions. Powers, Hurst, and Connor, I won't have at any price. They'll find the town too hot to hold them, I'm thinking. A bad lot! I expected better things of Hurst."

"He always was a queer fellow," replied the foreman, gravely; "though the last one I should have said to take sides with such men as Connor."

"Tainted with French socialism. Those fellows ought to found a community, eh, Baxter? and have all things in common. Poor devils! Do they think that they can pull down social fabrics which existed before they were born, and will stand until the world is old and gray?"

Mr. Norcross gave a hearty, cheery laugh. He was well pleased at belonging to the victorious side. And though he had groaned a good deal about ruin, he still wore his elegant diamond pin, kept his fast horses, ate good dinners, and smoked expensive cigars.

"You'll take back the others?"

"Yes. It is only the ringleaders. We have resolved to extinguish them," with a pompous inflection on the "We," that spoke volumes.

"It is a pity that men have so little sense. They were all good workmen."

"They have had their frolic, now let them pay the piper."

The leaders found themselves marked men. A few left the town, breathing threats of vengeance. Connor, an unsteady man at the best, hung around low groggeries, while his wife went out washing and his children to the factories; but Victor Hurst had as yet taken no decisive step.

Going away seemed almost impossible; for when it came to that, a strong man was needed in the house. John Hurst was better, and might live years; but he had to be carried to and fro like a child. It was hardly possible for him ever to recover the use of his lower limbs, and a slender woman like Anah could not manage him.

They had been poor many a time before. The prayer for daily bread proved no fanciful petition to the open-handed, self-denying clergyman. But there had always been a hope of something, a clinging to the provision made for the ravens when they cry, to the all-enduring promises of God; yet with her morbid conscientiousness she hardly knew whether to pray or to accept meekly and silently the punishment for sin.

She sat, knitting. It was her fancy never to be unemployed. But as she went through the continuous round of stitches, she watched her moody and dispirited son.

It seemed, somehow, as if she was answerable for the wreck of his life. She had failed in some important duty or trust: been weak, when she should have been firm. With the capability of self-torture, found in so many women, she invented rack and scourge in endless questioning, and submitted patiently to the pain.

"Will you go this evening?" she asked, at length, in a slow,

hesitating tone, stirring the fire, glad to break the monotony of the last half-hour.

"I don't think I can, mother," in an unsteady tone, twitching nervously at his steel watch-chain.

"Victor—" her tone was lower and slower, "I spent our last dollar to-day."

"I cannot beg—of them. They would preach me a sermon and send me away empty-handed."

"It is a just debt;" a rising color fluttering over her pale face. "The laborer is worthy of his hire. I always believed that."

"But he doesn't get it—in spiritual any more than in carnal matters. It is the princes who feast and the laborers who starve, the world over. I wonder if there is a God to watch it all?"

She raised her eyes imploringly.

"Here is my father, who, like some of the men of old, gave up everything for his religion. Has God restored tenfold? Even his brethren conspire to wrong him out of a paltry sum that was earned by the hardest—"

"No, you misjudge them. It has been neglect only. I dare say they think it is all paid."

"They have had opportunities to go over their books in the course of the last eight months, one would imagine."

"They sent part, you know;" in a voice of gentle excuse.

It was the old question of the salary that had never been wholly paid.

"No," he said, crushing down some rising bitterness, "I can't ask them for it, I'd rather starve. But for you and him—"

"It is his just due."

"Well, I'm in bad repute here, at Weareham. I've been thinking that I shall have to go after all. Every shop is barred against me. I can get work elsewhere, I know; and if a good strong woman could be found—"

She rose and went to the window. It was dark and lower-

ing without : not a star visible, and bitter blasts moaning up and down, like forlorn ghosts. If she dared to go over to the trustee-meeting and ask for this pittance—fifty odd dollars—it would keep them a month longer, give her her son that while, and something *might* happen.

But it was a long, lonesome walk, and suddenly she felt weak as if deserted by both God and man.

"Yes," he went on huskily, "we may as well look the matter in the face. The luck is all against me here. I will go somewhere and take a fresh start at anything that offers. I will not set up for a genius or a philanthropist," with a fierce, scornful smile that was very sad in its desperation. "I'll make a new home and come for you then, for I shall never, never part with you."

She came back to the fire, and standing behind him, clasped her arms around his neck. "God help me to give up this idol," she prayed inwardly, "this sin of Achan in the camp."

"As you will," she returned, humbly.

"It will not be for long—" hopefully.

And yet he knew that business was dull everywhere, and that a stranger's chance was a slender one at best.

"I will see that you have credit while I am gone. And if some one could help you care for him until—"

He felt the tear dropping on his cheek. With that he drew the head down and kissed the wet eyelids, and for many moments neither spoke.

For their lives had come to such a dreary, desperate pass. He desiring to do the best had fallen upon the worst; and yet had there not been foul selfishness within?

The wind swept up without in broad gusts. Even the fire seemed to burn dully.

They paid little heed to the carriage going past over the frozen ground, making hollow echoes, nor even noticed that the horses were stopped, and voices raised rather high in conversation.

Then some one strode up the path, and feet were vigorously stamped on the stone beyond the porch—a habit with Janet McRae, and not any disdainful shaking off of the dust.

Anah Hurst started, wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and trembled at the authoritative knock. Victor answered it, leaving his mother standing in the middle of the floor.

"Does the Reverend John Hurst reside here?"

The tone was so fresh and breezy, that it was like a waft of some inspiriting mountain air.

"Yes;" and Victor ushered in two persons, tall and well enveloped in winter travelling-gear, but faces that he had never seen before.

"And is this Anah Hurst? I think I should know the face, although you're worn and thin. But you've forgotten me—Janet McRae. I was at your father's house once before you were married."

Three and twenty years ago. She remembered now—some distant cousins.

"And this is my friend—Doctor Trewartha."

Anah Hurst blushed and stammered in her amazement, like any girl.

"I suppose it is a great surprise. No doubt I ought to have come long ago; but to tell the truth, I was a little vexed with your father the last time I saw him. I was quite willing to take you; for, if you remember, Sandy and I never had any children, but your father kept up a stubborn old feud with our branch of the McRaes. A whimsical old fellow, with nothing Scotch about him save that. And so I've come at last, after discouragements that would have daunted any other woman. A few miles below the town there must be a misplaced switch, and from its effects we stood on the road good two hours, waiting for them to clear away the débris."

She paused then to take breath. Victor glanced at her in astonishment. A woman past sixty, but with a fresh, fair look,

as if she would never be quite done with youth. Nearly as tall as her companion, but erect as any stately pine: her blue eyes still sharp and bright, her face unwrinkled, the mouth shutting firmly over sound white teeth, the lips full and rosy. Not a particularly handsome woman, with the large features, square jaw, and high cheek-bones; but remarkable for her vigor, wholesomeness, and buoyant energy.

"Yes, you were married, and your father died. I heard of that," nodding her head and approaching the fire where Victor had placed two chairs. "You've gone your way and I've gone mine; but I think it would have been better if your father had listened to me;" sharply, holding her head loftily as she sat down.

"Well, we are the last of the family now, so it is best to let by-gones be by-gones. I am an old woman, and you are not as young as you were twenty years ago. This is your son?"

"This is my son—Victor."

In spite of all she had to remember, she uttered the words with a little pride.

"I have had no children." And Anah Hurst guessed the pain that came in the strong woman's heart. "Perhaps it is as well. They bring care and trouble from the hour of their birth. There's not much of the old blood in him—you and your father were famous for mixing it. I should say there was more Saxon than Scotch about him; but he is a fine, well-grown lad. I need hardly tell you, Doctor Trewartha, after having been so remiss, that this is Mrs. Hurst and her son."

Trewartha rubbed his hands together in the glow of the fire-light. A manly man, strong, healthy, heartsome, with none of the city nervousness and anxiety about him—a man used to good cheer and generous thoughts. The evident air of prosperity struck Victor in a very vivid fashion.

Janet McRae must needs tell all her own story first.

"So I asked Doctor Trewartha, who is my right-hand man—for Mr. McRae died fifteen years ago, as you heard, doubt-

less, at the time; you were living at Northfield then—to come and help me hunt you up, being the last of kin. We should have been here by mid-afternoon but for the mishaps on the road. I dare say you are much surprised; but when I take a whim in my head I follow it out, sharp. I never yet saw the use of sitting a month or two in private contemplation as to which foot you should put forward first. And now, Anah Hurst, if you're satisfied to take up acquaintance with an old kinswoman, give me your hand."

Anah responded gratefully. The strength and cheerful voice seemed to revivify her.

"A very bird's claw," she said, pressing the thin fingers. "You need mountain air, and good, wholesome food. You've been in trouble, I hear?" dropping her voice a trifle.

Anah Hurst had a vague, confused feeling, like some shy, prisoned creature, whose cage-doors are opened, and who sees endless vistas of green fields beyond.

"Yes," she answered, with a sigh, turning her eyes away from the too glowing vision.

"Mr. Hurst is still alive?"

"A little better, we think."

"His attack was paralysis?"

"Yes."

"Over-work and meagre diet, I suppose. Clergymen have no right to be poor!" in a vigorous, almost scornful tone.

"If the world makes them so?" And Victor Hurst turned his clear-cut face around suddenly.

"Being poor, they have no business with preaching and the like. The world has too much of it already. People want work and bread instead of sermons."

"But they die at last," said Doctor Trewartha.

"Yes, I know!" with a fierce nod. "But I doubt the death-bed glorifying when a man has been a thief, and a liar, and a drunkard. They need to be taught how to live, how to take care of their souls and bodies. God will watch over the rest."

Trewartha drew his chair nearer Victor when he saw the young man's knitted brow. It would not do to have a quarrel in the very beginning; and knowing Janet McRae so well, he was anxious that these people should be better acquainted with her before they judged.

"How long has your father been ill?" he asked.

"Eight months," briefly.

"There has been some change, of course?"

"Yes."

"What were the particulars of the first seizure?"

Victor began to think, and the talk of the woman floated out of his brain. Something in Trewartha interested him strangely.

Mrs. McRae plied Anah with questions. She had heard that Mr. Hurst was quite well-to-do before he took up preaching—for many years she had lost sight of them altogether. Where had they lived? what had they done?

Anah made her story as short as possible. She was a reticent woman by nature, and there was a good deal of the old pride left in her, in spite of the daily warfare. After all, how much *does* religion change human nature?

"You've had only the one child?" drawing her chair nearer to Anah, and speaking in a low tone.

"That is all."

"And you have known little about managing him, I take it. I saw his name in the Trades' riots," dropping her voice to a whisper. "As if bread wasn't more to starving men than all your fine speeches and principles."

"He went astray," Anah said, with a face of deepening pain.

"He knew nothing of the business, of the rights and wrongs," she returned, sharply. "And yet he showed spirit, energy. He is in the wrong place, Anah Hurst."

"I know it, I know it," piteously.

"It was the old war upon wind-mills. Men never learn anything by experience—women either, for that matter. When

times are dull wages *will* be low. The law of supply and demand regulates these things. So it was foolhardy in him to lead a movement at that time. But he doesn't look as if—he belonged to the rabble. Is it the Hurst blood?"

Anah flushed distressfully.

"We'll talk it all over some day. I have a good deal to say to you, and I know that I have dropped down upon you most unceremoniously. But I declared this morning that I wouldn't rest until I'd seen you, and I would take as much pains to keep truth with myself as any other person. Then I cannot bear to be crossed and thwarted by puny mischances. I shall rest the more soundly for my ride out here. Doctor Trewartha, how nearly up is our time?"

Trewartha pulled out his watch, a solid, old-fashioned, gold repeater, with a massive chain, plain as a cable-cord.

"Fifteen minutes. You told the man to come in an hour?"

"Yes."

"I would ask you to see my husband," Mrs. Hurst said slowly "but he sleeps soundly the first part of the night. Still—"

"No, wait until to-morrow," interrupted Mrs. McRae. "We shall come again. Doctor Trewartha has his head full of quips and quirks about diseases. Most of all, you want to get out of this place. There's nothing like mountain air for the bodies and souls of men. I'm glad to have found you before it was too late."

"I should like to see your husband. From what your son has told me, I should think his case peculiar, to say the least. And if I could be of any service—".

"Thank you," Mrs. Hurst murmured.

The four rose and stood in a group, making a picture of striking contrasts. Victor felt it keenly. A question of wealth, merely. But the ease and grace and air of superiority was theirs. Poverty was a cloud upon his mother's refinement: it had taken the bright red blood out of her veins, the roundness from her figure, the happy, satisfied smile from her face. What

if John Hurst had let those poor souls down yonder go whither they would, and thought more of his own comfort?

"So I shall come in again to-morrow," Mrs. McRae began to repeat. "You will be better able to judge then how far you care to take up acquaintance with an old kinswoman. That is the carriage, Doctor Trewartha."

They all heard the rattle of the wheels. Mrs. McRae retied her bonnet-strings; drew her thick, soft fur mantle about her throat; and then half crushed Anah Hurst's thin hand in hers so firm and warm; and smiled on her in a cordial fashion that was absolutely fascinating. This life had been so full and generous: hers so meagre and bald.

"Good-night, friends. It is not a good-by until you decree that our ways lie separate."

The long ray of light from the half-curtained window was all that broke the dead blankness outside. How bitterly cold and drear it was! Yet Trewartha's tone almost made a spring dawn of it.

Anah Hurst opened the hand that ached with the pressure so recently given it, and began to straighten out something—a fifty dollar note.

"Charity!" Victor said, in a great and unreasonable tumult of soul.

"It is the Lord;" and she bowed her head reverently.

But Victor saw no God in the hand.

A hard, dogmatic, purse-proud woman, who had hunted up some needy relatives to swell the list of her worshippers, and add to the insense on the shrine of her self-love.

"He has answered my prayer at last, and raised up friends in our need," she went on, in a low, grateful tone, that was thanksgiving in itself.

Victor looked at the saint-like face. How much she had borne, and how meekly. Was there, of a truth, an undercurrent that he knew nothing about—that sometimes saw God face to face?

"I was not aware that you had any connections living," he said, presently.

"I knew not whether they were living or dead. I remember that Mrs. McRae came to our house once, sometime before my father died, and that the two had a dispute, parting bad friends. My father was hot and unreasonable when roused. They were distant cousins, and she married one of the relatives. The family never was large."

"But rich," Victor said, in a half-repressed contempt.

"They were thrifty, hard-working people;" and she sighed a little. Her father had never troubled himself about the small details of economy or management in any shape.

"I like Doctor Trewartha. Can he be a relative?"

"I hardly think so." Then she turned and studied her son's face.

"Victor," she began again, falteringly, "whatever good or pleasure may come out of this visit,—whatever friendship may be proffered, do not refuse. For what Janet McRae gives she gives ungrudgingly."

She looked so worn and weary, so tired with the buffetings of many storms, that his heart was moved with infinite pity.

"Mother," he cried, thrusting down a great wave of passion that in another soul might have made tears, "God knows that I have brought you pain enough following my own devices. I have never been the comfort that a son should be. I thought myself so much wiser than *he*," nodding to the closed room beyond, "and went to meddling with souls as well as bodies, and have failed miserably. Nothing that I ever touched prospered. And since I have shown myself so weak, so easily led astray, I will take the destiny of no other human creature in my hands. If Janet McRae chooses to befriend you and my father, no word of mine shall anger or frustrate good intentions. Let her come as she will. I have dragged you nearly to starvation."

She noticed that he left himself out. Yes, he would be too

proud to live on Mrs. McRae's money, if it ever came to that; and somehow the cordial clasps of the hand had meant a good deal to her, gone to the depths of her soul. It would be as well, perhaps, for him to carve out his own fortune—if he could ever find the right place.

"We all make mistakes;" with pathetic submission.

"But mine was such a senseless blunder. And yet I think I had a little right on my side, at all events. I was true to my order at last;" with a kind of scornful pity.

Was it his order? John Hurst, in the narrowness of human wisdom, had put him there, but the soul would go on struggling and beating the bars until it found liberty and space to cleave the air with its wings.

All she could do was to pray, for she had returned to the God-given centre of faith after all her wanderings and unbelief. God would send the right in His own good time.

Meanwhile Doctor Trewartha pulled the lap-robe over his companion's feet, although the coach was closed. She settled herself with her strong, independent air, and looked quite a queen in the dim light of the lamp.

"Well," he said, "are you satisfied?" And there was a quiet curl of amusement around the bearded mouth.

"If I had expected to regret it I should not have come."

"There is quite a space between satisfaction and regret;" gravely, still smiling. "And first impressions sway you."

"Which matters little, since they do not need to be of unalloyed pleasure. But you are never satisfied, Doctor Trewartha, until one is turned inside out for your delectation. Well, Anah Hurst is a good deal changed; has become a weak, religious enthusiast, which is just so much better than a strong one. She needs fresh air, generous food, walks and rides, and some society of the right kind, to give her moral strength and largeness of purpose and idea. I never did fancy women fed exclusively on a diet of sermons."

"Unless you had to preach them yourself."

She laughed this time; she was used to his sharp thrusts.

"Yes, I like my own preaching. It is a weakness of human nature,—I cling to a few in order to keep myself womanly."

"And the young man—?" when she had made a long pause.

"The face is too handsome. It brought up a shadowy something that eludes my memory; but there is passion and ambition in it, a strong side of feeling and but half-grown brain, or he wouldn't have thrown himself into that gulf yonder, poor fool! He's been fed on a mush of transcendentalism, and rights, and wrongs, until he hardly knows where he stands, and yet he has the face of an aristocrat. It's the contradiction I like," growing vehement; "the weak side of inconsistency, the rapid moods travelling from heaven to hell in a moment of space, and the mouth that shuts in hopes, aims, and desires, like a vice. He would never utter weak, blatant cries when fate had him at her worst."

"You have been studying him pretty well," said the Doctor in some surprise.

"My eyes were for him, my ears for his mother. And, Frank Trewartha, I mean to take them home with me. If he suits me on farther acquaintance, I shall make him heir of Cragness. I'd like to go to my grave with the thought of a McRae reigning after me. Though he has but little of the blood—there never was a handsome one in the whole race. I mean that he shall have the name, however."

Doctor Trewartha sat and mused. "She should have had a son," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE morning came in with a storm : a dreary leaden sky and a bitter wind scurrying the pellets of snow about and drifting them into nooks and crannies, corners of stoops, and the ground edge of fences. Anah Hurst tidied up her simple room, bathed her husband's face and hands, and put on his gray woollen dressing-gown. Victor lifted him into the arm-chair and dragged him in front of the fire.

There was something in the wasted and melancholy figure and the indescribable pathos of the eyes that touched Victor singularly this morning, especially as they followed him round with that haunting, longing look. You could see that the brain had gone a little astray, in the effort he made to think, to recover his own identity and that of those around him, or perhaps some subtle sense of the secret he considered his, and felt that he must still hide. A wandering, wavering light, unsubstantial as dreams, and a childish longing for the love he had deemed it his duty to thrust aside, when the march of life was hurried. Heaven knows it was slow enough now.

"Are you going away?" reaching out the hand that shook visibly, something beyond a mere nervous tremble.

"I was not."

He came a little nearer and took the wasted fingers in his, tried to smile soothingly into the apprehensive eyes.

"I thought you were going ;" in a vague way, as if trying to remember. "We should be all alone, Victor, two poor old people. I used to think—if God ever gave me a son—it vanishes so fast, like the light playing over the water. I meant to do the best. You were a pretty little boy, Victor—I used to

carry you in my arms to church when your hair was like threads of gold. What is it?—a sword to pierce through thine own heart! She loved you so well, better than God, I was afraid, and after her prayers she used to go and kiss you in the cradle. Sometimes in the night I would miss her, and I could see her standing there like a white phantom. God forbade idols, you know."

Anah knelt down and leaned her cheek against her husband's knee. Perhaps the poor old man had fought a jealous demon in his own heart as well.

"There are no idols," she said, in her sweet, clear voice. "God bade us love and comfort one another. If He gave Himself for the world, ought not we to give ourselves to love and good works for His sake?"

"I wanted him saved;" his long lids dropping dreamily. "It would have been so hard for her not to find her little boy in heaven. Could any one have comforted her?"

Victor turned his eyes to his mother's, dimly understanding what temporal or spiritual loss would be to her.

"I've made many mistakes; I couldn't always see the way clearly. But you will not be hard with me, Victor? God knows, sometimes we get astray on paths not His."

The restless, nervous fingers began to pick at the hem of his gown, and the words fell more slowly and incoherently. He often talked to himself by the hour, sitting in the ruin of his own mind, waiting for the time when he should be "clothed upon" with immortality. Why had God sent this upon him, his own faithful servant?

"You won't leave me, Victor? It will not be long, I think."

"I shall not leave you;" clearly, and with a solemn awe in his voice. Death seemed so near, death which was to unravel the tangle of the three lives.

The stamping of feet on the door-step roused Anah Hurst. She knew to whom the stir must belong.

"They have come!" in her woman's consternation, as if she would fain have shut them out.

But when they had entered and brought the buoyant life, the sense of energy and strength that a vigorous healthy temperament always imparts, Anah felt like clinging to them, strangers though they were. Janet McRae, with her imperious grace and magnetic vitality, seemed to draw her by some occult charm, in spite of the sharp tongue.

"I said I would come, you know, and here I am. A McRae would sooner go to his death, I believe, than break his word, even in a trifle. Trewartha here has scolded me soundly for bolting down upon you last night. You slept well, I hope?"

Anah smiled. The voice was so warm, cheery, and heartsome.

"That's right, my dear, only it looks like a straggling sunbeam after a March storm. I'm old enough to be your mother, and the last of your kin. I think you know, that I mean you well. I can take contradiction, and even a flat denial; but cowardly souls I never could endure."

Victor raised his eyes at this. The lad seemed to promise a good fight, and she experienced an instinctive longing to take him in hand—to shape the soul into that of a hero. A very weak, miserable, soul he felt it just now.

"This is my husband."

Anah Hurst clasped the hand in hers and seemed to sway his unsteady eyes with the motion. "John, you remember hearing my father speak of cousin McRae of Cragness? This is she. And the gentleman is Doctor Trewartha."

"McRae. Yes, your father—dead long ago;" glancing at her wistfully. "I don't understand."

"I'm a kinswoman of your wife, her only one. I think you will trust her with me, that you will take me for a friend?" and stooping her tall figure, Janet McRae looked steadily into the wandering eyes, seeming to rouse their latent strength as nothing had done since the stroke.

"A friend—yes;" with the look of patient reflection you sometimes behold in the face of a dumb beast when it seems as if its soul would be moved to speech.

"A friend;" still with the peculiar force and steadiness. "We are the last of a long and honorable line."

Victor flushed. She had spoken the truth unwittingly. Those two women, so very dissimilar, were the last of their honorable line.

"And Doctor Trewartha would like to examine a little into your case. I hardly need recommend him," glancing at Anah.

No, the face spoke for itself. A good, sweet, courtly gentleman, with a tender, heartsome smile and a rich voice that carried with it some secret of a life well used. John Hurst appeared to listen and think as if he had heard it in some other country.

"We will leave them together," Mrs. McRae began. "I have much to say to you, much to hear."

So the two went out to the old kitchen and sat in front of the broad fireplace.

"It has been a hard life," the elder said, "I can tell by your face. God's vicegerents now are not treated as well as the Levites of old. Few people can afford to give a tenth, but still they demand ministers. I think a clergyman who underrates himself sins as much as they—panders to their selfishness. If they dared to do so at Cragness I should shut up the church. I'm not much of a believer in it myself; but I should stand up for one man's rights as soon as another. There's a monstrous sight of wrong-dealing in this world."

"God will set it right at last, I think," deprecatingly.

"Humph! So you wait for that? There's one text that I think worth dozens of your weak resignation: 'Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.' And the children of this day want speaking to pretty often, according to my thinking. The world is full of laggards, who would rather sit with folded hands and sing psalms than be up and doing."

"He never sat with folded hands, but went to the last moment, the last step."

"Yes, I've heard of him. I told you last night the men who took such work upon themselves, ought to have fortunes."

"He was called. He left everything."

"Yes. This was his reward," glancing around the bare, common room. "And the burden he is bearing—that you are all bearing. Anah Hurst, I wonder sometimes what the religion of the world is worth. I don't doubt that he was a good man, and his brethren have left him to trust God to the uttermost. I dare say some of them ride in their carriages."

"He was content with his place."

"Well, I'm not content with yours, nor your son's. He flew off at a tangent on the other side, it seems. Well, well, we all try our hand at righting the world, and it will still go wrong after we are in our graves. I suppose it always did, for that matter, since the flood was early in its history. But I have something else on my mind. Your son has spirit and energy, certainly. How did he get among that rabble? He doesn't look as if his choicest sympathies were with them. He's not a McRae, still less is he a Hurst. But one can never answer for all the tricks of ancestry."

"His father thought it better that he should have a trade," and the color fluttered over her worn face.

"I've no objection to that. The McRaes worked for generations before I was born, and I'm none the worse for it. But maybe something else would have done better for the child, filled his hungry brain. In these days brains have come to be a deal of trouble. So I have resolved to take you all back to Cragness with me."

Anah Hurst started up in utter astonishment.

"Yes. There are broad acres of farm-land, mountain-wilds, a mill, a stone-quarry—and gold for all I know," with a short laugh. "And why should I not do it? I have no kith nor kin beside."

"But—," for though Anah Hurst had thought of possible generosity, nothing so entire had found its way to her soul, in its wildest imaginings.

"It will be better for the lad, I think, and change into mountain air may benefit your husband. Trewartha will decide when and how it will be possible to move him. Hush, not a word. I am impoverishing no one. Suppose, after having lived your life of penury—after seeing your son drag through a miserable existence with poverty and discouragements, a fortune should come to him at the last. Better a little now, I say. I'm not going to make him rich, but to give him a fair start."

Anah reached out her hand.

"You are too good," she almost sobbed.

"No, I'm not good at all. Dispossess your mind quickly of that idea. I'm a proud, self-willed, cranky old woman. But I should not have the grace to die without leaving you a few thousands, and for all I see I may as well use them now."

They talked until almost noon. Trewartha and Victor, in the adjoining room, made rapid strides into good-fellowship. It was Victor's first real experience with depth, strength, and culture, and he found it very fascinating.

Meanwhile the storm had increased. Streets and lanes were white with the tempest of snow, still whirling little mounds to the sheltered side. Mrs. Hurst began to prepare her dinner. Victor was summoned and requested to do some simple marketing. She handed him the note received last night from Mrs. McRae.

"No, I couldn't touch it;" with a young man's sensitive pride, the fine nostrils curling impatiently.

"It is all I have. When they pay father—"

He thrust his fur cap over his eyes, pulled his coat-collar up round his chin, and stamped his way down the walk. Two pictures came vividly before his mental vision—Alfred Lowndes, "our talented and painstaking young countryman on the high road to fame," as the papers had announced him at his depart-

ure, sunning himself in that far land of beauty and art, and winning praise, making money with what? a paltry gift of presenting nature in her washed-up drawing-room attire of small prettiness; and Doctor Trewartha, a man of true culture, refinement, ease, rare humor and knowledge of all kinds, able to classify the lizards found in rocks centuries old, and tell you what gradations of color went to make an autumn leaf. Not that he envied Lowndes, only the luck that had placed him where he was; nor Trewartha, any farther than the life and wealth that had given him such advantages. Fifteen years from this he could reach neither estate, not having the trick of popularity the one possessed, nor the ease and leisure of the other. Talk of a man working his way up—was it an easy task when brain and soul and limbs were exhausted with severe physical labor?

He turned into the little shop. Sometimes they had an account standing here when the salary had been very much in arrears; but now he must deliberately ask for credit.

"Morning, Hurst. Bitterish kind of a storm. Been threatening a long while, though. How's your father?"

Then James Penly went on chopping the ragged edges off of a piece of meat, and throwing them on another block for sausage.

"About the same."

"What'll you have?" seeing that his customer was rather backward, and half-suspecting the truth.

"Several articles, and—if you will let them stand—" stammering, as he crushed down his pride.

"Well—" hesitatingly, "times *are* pretty hard; business of all kinds being so dull. Awful work to collect money. Got a look for anything?"

"No;" the fair face turning swarthy with mortification. "But the salary has not all been paid, or I should not ask you to wait." He felt quite willing now to take it in hand.

"Hasn't?" with a kind of contemptuous laugh. "You

might about as well give *that* up, then. Rather *on*lucky that you should have gone so deep into the strike, Hurst."

Victor turned as if he would leave the place.

"Don't be so huffy, young man. I've never been disobliging yet to an honest neighbor. Come, what'll you have?" with an air of alacrity.

Victor swallowed his pride and the deeper wound, and made his few purchases. This was the real sting of poverty; but he did not mean that Mrs. McRae should eat her dinner in their house, bought with her own money.

Doctor Trewartha had been discussing Mr. Hurst's case with the two women.

"He should have been taken out through the summer, and thus assisted in regaining the use of his limbs; and the exercise would have been beneficial to his brain as well. There can be hardly any hope of his ultimate recovery, but he may improve, as his constitution still seems strong. Change of scene, and an entirely different life, must be the first step."

Anah sighed. How easy it was to talk—to prescribe. God had sent poverty and misfortune upon them, but they were not alone. She had seen so many poor, weary creatures stretched upon beds of helplessness, until from her sad, overflowing heart she had cried, "How long, O Lord, how long?" *Was* the world ruled with justice and wisdom?

"We thought of going away," she said, hesitatingly. "Victor had planned—"

"I may as well tell you, Trewartha, that *I* have not only planned, but have made known my wishes. When could Mr. Hurst endure the fatigue of a journey?"

"He could be moved as soon as the weather would permit," glancing from one to the other in the utmost surprise, and then smiling. He might have known that Janet McRae would lose no time.

"But the young man—"

"Mrs. Hurst has trained her son but poorly if he refuses to see what is so evidently for his own advantage," in a quick tone, tapping her foot sharply upon the floor.

Trewartha came round to her side and said, just under his breath—"Be careful: the fellow is as proud as Lucifer."

"But you think him worth saving?"

"I think him worth it;" with an odd, far-light in the eyes, as if speculating upon some matter.

"I'll be tender of his pride;" laughing complacently.

Trewartha would have gone about the business cautiously: questioned the young man's wants, and aims, and longings, and entrapped him upon some unwary admission—he half suspected them now—and then led him gently to the point. Straightforward women have more confidence in the force of simple truth, depending less upon logical sequences.

So that afternoon she laid the matter before Victor, growing eloquent over the advantages his parents would derive from the change.

"And as for you," she went on, in her caustic but sweet-humored way, that, after all, was her most fascinating gift, "I should think you had gone to the end of your tether here. You will find that a man's blunders are remembered against him more readily than his sins, in this world, where want of success is a crime. Come to Cragness, and see how you like it. You can find plenty of work there, if that is your fancy," studying him with her keen blue eyes.

"Poverty and work go together naturally, I believe. It is an ancient partnership, never to be divorced;" meeting her glance with an under-current of defiance that she liked. Weak people were her abomination.

"John Hurst made a mistake when he gave you that birthright. He should have done better."

A faint purple line showed about Victor's mouth. The world outside would never know what John Hurst had done for him, and he had chivalry enough not to hear him blamed.

"He did what he thought right. I can't make it clear how much God demands, but *he* gave Him *all*. As for the years to come, I shall take care of him while he lives. I shall not go to the wall because the luck was against me."

"Luck!" with a fiery, downward breath, like an impatient snort. "You struck your blow at the wrong time, that was all—a blunder. You tried to fight capital when business was growing dull, and men had swarmed in from the country, more fools they; and your workmen, living from hand to mouth, can hold out about so long—employers know that, too. The week's wages, the Trade's fund, and credit at the corner grocery—a matter of two months, may be less, and then submission."

"I think we had the right of it," doggedly. "Just a bare subsistence for the men with families, and that to be lowered when extra expenses were coming on."

"Let them fight their own battles another time."

"I couldn't. You do not understand. If I had refused to join the men I should have been marked on the other side. I was no great favorite with them any way."

"You don't belong to them;" tapping her foot hard to give her words force.

"It is difficult to tell where some men do belong," with a bitter smile, thinking how everything had conspired to throw him into this groove. Even Lowndes had raised his hand.

"You are young enough to try it over again. More than one person has missed the path in his hot unreasoning youth."

He made no answer. She watched the power and beauty in his face, the sharp discordant lines that looked so inharmonious. And though in her sturdy Scotch pride she would have flung out the Greek grace and sort of sculptured contour, as a woman it rather pleased her. It was not soft and vascillating. He could be sharp and ungracious when the mood took him.

"So you will come to Cragness," she went on, as if the matter was settled. "It is not likely your father can live many years. I shall wish to keep your mother after that myself, and you can try your fortune. By that time you will know best what to do."

Victor Hurst's eyes wandered to the drooping figure of his mother. She was sitting beside her husband, Trewartha making a third, and explaining some curious case over which he had puzzled years agone. He noted the sharpened outlines, the thin fingers busy with the knitting, the slow-moving melancholy eyes, the pale grayish skin with no soft flush or elasticity about it. She, barely past the boundary-line of forty, and this hardy, brilliant, forcible woman, with breath fragrant as dewy violets, cheeks with the flush of youth, no sense of loss or incompleteness about her, no hint of privation in the firm, rosy flesh, and lacking only a few years of the allotted three score and ten.

Would it not be cruel to deprive her of the only alleviation that might come in her life? And then he had half promised her.

If Mrs. McRae knew the secret that he and his mother held between them, would she still ask? But were they bound to drag up the sins of another person and answer for them?

"I will come to Cragness," he began, in a slow, deliberate tone, "if I can find work there. I could obtain it elsewhere, but the trouble is to leave them alone until I am able to make a new home. We are very poor."

He did not flush but rather paled at this confession. And she, reading the stormy, pricking pride, the bitter humiliation, was minded to help him, and answered more softly—

"John Hurst might have been a prosperous man if he had thought more of himself and less of his neighbors. I don't know but he went beyond the commandment. We understand the need of a heaven when we see such lives."

Then she was not all satire and self-esteem. He seemed to draw nearer to her, silently.

"You shall find the work. I have to depend upon my good friend Doctor Trewartha for many favors where it would be good to have help of one's own. Since Mr. McRae's death, sixteen years ago, I have carried on the place alone."

"One's own!" A tint of the McRae blood ran in his veins to be sure, but—as a curious suspicion flashed through his brain—how could he well help—he would be the last of the race. No, if she thought of such a thing it could never, never be. One way and another every family carried about with them some honors, pride, wealth, lineage, pure blood, and there had been a curse set upon him that would mock them all.

"While my parents live I shall be their stay and support. I think I have some roving fancies in my brain, and if I were free to follow them—"

"Yes, I understand;" nodding her head. "While they live, then."

He was surprised at her ready concession.

She glanced at him from under her wide, drooping lids as a huntsman might at the wild shy falcon he allures to his finger. Once there—

"A woman's wit is as keen as a man's," she said to herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MILD February sun lay warm over the landscape, making the snow seem like fields of amber. On the high back-ground to the west the trees were distinctly outlined against a sky that wavered in azure lights. Lower and lower, range after range, until you came to the broad sweep of table-land broken by clumps of timber left uncut, or here and there a nest of houses in the ambitious fellowship of a straggling village.

From her post by the large embayed window, Sylvia Redmond studied the picture. This old stone mansion stood on a rise of ground with a grove of giant oaks between it and the northern blasts. Over to the west were the chain of mountains, far to the south the towns, so far, indeed, that the smoke and din never penetrated this clear, clean air. Janet McRae would have it so.

"If the railroad came up five miles higher, it would be worth a fortune to you," Dr. Trewartha had said.

"What do I want of a fortune?" in her sharp, ringing tone. "It is near enough."

"It would make the farm-produce so much more available."

"The farms are well enough."

The towns and villages had felt the effects; but Cragness stood as it did fifty years ago, not even caring to hold out its hand to advancing civilization.

To the eastward there were three or four mansions belonging to the gentry, stretched far apart, with their wide, surrounding acres. A rather lonely place most people would have thought, but Sylvia liked it. She never wearied standing by this window,

noting all the fine detail of the still-life picture. She had seen the old blackened tree down yonder scathed by lightning, the great group of pines so black and uncanny in winter, the indentation of the river winding round, at this season frozen over, but every curve in it was fresh to her memory. Not a hillock but she could have placed rightly, had she been thousands of miles away, sketching the scene.

"Ruth," she exclaimed, suddenly turning to her companion, "are there no old legends connected with this house?"

"Old legends? Not that I know of."

The quiet, unsmiling face never moved, the white fingers went on with their work, a piece of heavy silk-embroidery for a chair.

"You would have heard them?"

"I suppose so."

"That is why I like Rothermel. There are such hosts of pictures, and odd, quaint stories about them. Knights and ladies, and strange, weird faces full of daring and passion. I like it better even than my uncle's in Virginia, though the old negro women there tell me stories of love and murder and witchcraft."

"With but little truth in them."

"What does it matter, after all? I like the glamor of romance. I always look over the old Gilliat chronicles for the war scenes, and then take a peep at the picture of royalist Sir Hugh in his scarlet-slashed doublet. That is true, at least;" with a silvery little laugh. "You are so matter of fact, Ruth."

"Yes; that was too sadly true. The only legend of the McRaes, if you can call it one, is the fact that some of its men fought with Cromwell."

"I hate the Roundheads! Think how they must have looked, with their cropped hair and straight coats, singing psalms with a whine through their nose."

"They were good men," sturdily; "and when they could

no longer live according to the light of their consciences, they crossed the sea."

"And burned those who would not agree with them. An odd species of toleration. I think your ancestors suffered a little there. I should hate them if I were you."

Was it her Quaker blood, half a century back, that made Ruth Garnier so impassible?

"Why should I hate them? They are all dead and gone, and lived according to their light. It is for God to judge the rest."

Sylvia looked at her curiously. Sometimes during the past fortnight she had thought her very handsome. A tall, grand woman, with a white, opaque skin rarely flushing, steady dark-brown eyes, and a heavy crown of dark hair always in the same massive braids. Her dress was grave but rich, and fell about her in great waves, as she sat in the crimson chair. That, and the silks in the embroidery, gave her a peculiar brilliance, as the shining green leaves set off a waxen camelia. If she would only flush, or frown, or get into little heats, like other girls—for after all, there was only two years' difference in their ages. But Ruth Garnier might have been twenty-nine instead of nineteen.

"So, they were Roundheads?" going back to the former subject. "Mrs. McRae should be a staunch old Scotch Presbyterian, then?"

"I think the sharpness of creeds gets worn off," replied Ruth Garnier, in her slow, reflective manner.

"And laughed off, wherever Doctor Trewartha is," responded Sylvia, with a quick, gay smile that seemed a part of her emphatic little face. "Ruth, I am half in love with Doctor Trewartha."

Then the grave eyes were raised slowly to the girl standing by the window. The piquant little figure, flashing hair, dewy clear eyes, and rosebud mouth, were very sweet and winsome. Ruth had liked her as one likes a kitten or a spoiled yet

charming child. To hear her talk of love and Doctor Trewartha in the same breath!

"He is old enough to be your father;" in a tone of slow surprise. Everything about this girl was so deliberate, phlegmatic. Perhaps it was a part of her temperament.

"Well!" in her gay, sunny, child's tone. "What does the old adage say—'An old man's darling—a young man's slave.' I do not believe that I have any taste for slavery."

Then Ruth glanced out over the fast-wasting snow. On the ridges the ground began to show through. The amber tints were paling as the sun went westward, resolving themselves to grayish white in shadowy places.

"When will they return?"

"I don't know. We ought to have a letter to-day. Mrs. McRae wrote from New York last. She had gone thither on a little business."

"But it will be soon?"

Ruth was threading her needle with scarlet, and the contrast with the snow-white fingers attracted Sylvia. She was such a creature of moods and whims and changeful fancies.

"Are you growing homesick?" Ruth asked. "It is dull here without Mrs. McRae. I am poor company."

"No,—what put that into your head? I like it ever so much better than at cousin Braisted's. Everything is so wonderfully precise; and three old maids! Ruth, shall you ever marry?"

"How can I tell?" pushing the hair back from her temple and looking straight through vacancy.

"Sure enough. We do not know anything about it. Now I have a presentiment—there comes Matt!"

So the presentiment vanished. Sylvia ran out of the room and through the broad oaken panelled hall, tugging at the great door. She rather liked this being lawless and following out every passing impulse.

Matt halted his shaggy pony, sprang off, and brought a small rusty-looking bag up the steps.

"Mail, Miss Redmond."

"Yes."

She was off again like a flash, her long light hair floating behind her.

"There are your letters. Hurry! What news of Doctor Trewartha? I have half a mind to fall sick if you hear nothing."

Ruth laid her work on the chair opposite, opened the drawer of Mrs. McRae's desk, and took out a key.

"There is no need," she said presently. "Why—this letter has been delayed. They will be home to-morrow, the twentieth. And—"

Ruth made a long, thoughtful pause, so long that Sylvia exclaimed, impatiently—"Well?"

"They are to bring some visitors—connections."

"I thought Mrs. Janet McRae was the lone chief, the last of her family."

"It appears not. A Mr. and Mrs. Hurst—the latter a McRae."

"Hurst! It seems to me as if I had heard the name before," and Sylvia's bronze fringed lids drooped dreamily.

"And a son. The father is a hopeless invalid."

"I wonder what the son is like? Oh, Ruth!" with a great gasp.

"Why, child, what is the matter?" glancing up in a kind of constrained surprise.

"It's such an odd thought;" and Sylvia laughed. "Suppose Mrs. McRae means to make him her heir. Blood is thicker than water with a canny Scotsman. And it is the talk of the neighborhood that you are to inherit Cragness. Oh, I have it—you two must marry."

With that Sylvia clapped her baby hands, and laughed with eager delight. Ah, Janet McRae, how soundly you could have shaken the little witch had you been there, for thus betraying your half-formed plans in her absurd childish nonsense!

"Sylvia, how your head runs on marriage this afternoon. It is unwomanly."

"Ah, but I shall never be a woman. Mamma bewails the fact daily when I am with her. Besides, you know, this young Hurst may be some great clumsy hobble-de-hoy, just in his teens. So don't put on your quaker face, my darling, for it's always grave enough. You shall never marry at all, if it will please you better."

She kissed the smooth cheek in her extravagant fashion, bringing quite a rosy flush in it.

"Now you are beautiful," she declared. "You only want color and style, and a little spirit. Ruth, I wonder if there are any grand central fires in your soul. I feel sometimes as if I were a miniature Mount Vesuvius."

"I must tell Martha, and have the fires made to-night—"

"Oh, Eve, on hospitable thoughts intent!"

"The two east rooms; and they have not been opened since Christmas."

Ruth Garnier studied her letter slowly, and then as slowly walked out of the room, with her sweeping, magnificent step, that a stage queen might have envied.

Sylvia stood a moment by the window. There was a streak of pale, watery yellow in the west, and the world was fast being shrouded by the gray winter twilight, cold and cheerless. What a difference a little sun made! She did not love gloom, so she rolled Ruth's crimson chair toward the fire, and curled herself in it, drawing up her dainty feet, and leaning her head against the cushioned back. If an heir should come to Cragness, would it bring any pain to slow-brained, quiet-hearted Ruth? True, no one had positively said that Cragness was to be hers, but then for seven years Mrs. McRae had treated her as a daughter. And where had she heard that name—Hurst? It vexed her that she could not remember.

Then she resigned herself to her own sweet, fanciful dreams of airy nothings, in which Doctor Trewartha's laugh was the

gayest feature. He would come back to-morrow, and she would be lingering at Cragness.

Ruth, in the meanwhile, hunted up Martha Mason, the housekeeper, and gave her the instructions, with the letter still in hand.

"The rooms are to be well aired, warm, and comfortable; and they will be here a little past noon to-morrow. The letter was delayed two or three days."

"I can have it all ready, Miss Ruth, never fear. A connection of the family, you said? I've been here thirty years come Easter, and I've never heard mention of them. Stay—let me see—I think there was a Richard McRae whom they once visited, who had a daughter. I'm not quite clear in my mind. If so, she must have married a Hurst. The Madame has a large heart, Miss Ruth, but kin is kin, the world over."

Ruth Garnier went up to the rooms with Martha. They were chilly enough, from their long disuse, but large and well furnished.

"I'll just order the fires to be made to-night. Well, well! I'm glad to have the mistress coming back. It doesn't seem like the same house without her. Nearly a month gone."

Ruth and Sylvia had their supper alone in the quaint old dining-room, where the furniture and wainscoting were of the most antique kind. Then Sylvia read aloud from a novel, and Ruth sewed some trifle of white muslin. But when they were brushing out their hair in Ruth's room, Sylvia must needs speculate upon the new-comers.

The morning was a busy one. Both girls looked into the chambers now and then, and saw them approaching that state of neatness for which Martha Mason was renowned. Afterward Sylvia waited impatiently.

The day was much warmer, with a premonition of rain in the hazy, low-lying clouds. The road that had been smooth and glassy showed the ruts made by sledge-runners, and the horses began to track up the soil underneath. A soft, brood-

ing day, suggesting the distant spring, with velvet turf and violets.

Sylvia watched from her post at the window. She counted the trees and the hills; saw the tall chimney down below on the plain, and the clustering nest of houses indistinctly, as if she half dreamed it. Presently there came a long streak of dense black smoke against the delicate blue-gray sky.

"The train is in, Ruth."

"And my work is done. I believe there is not another stitch to put in it. Mrs. McRae will be so surprised. She said I would not have it finished before midsummer."

Ruth began to go carefully over the work with her steady eyes. Not a miss or flaw anywhere. It was very beautiful.

"Matt went down, of course?"

"Both Matt and Joe, and the two sleighs."

"We shall have a houseful. Of all things, I like a crowd and new faces. People seem ever so much more entertaining to me than books. There they are always accurately mapped out: so much goodness, so much angelic patience, such a temperament, and you know at once what the man or woman does. I like surprises."

"Certain temperaments are subject to certain laws. They must act as the motive power leads unless restrained by God's grace."

"Ruth, you were meant for a preacher."

"I think not;" with grave composure. "I have enough on my hands without taking the burden of the souls of others."

"How much?" She placed her small hands on Ruth's knees and looked earnestly into the placid brown eyes that were great calm lakes. "You never do anything wrong. You are helpful, industrious, kind, patient, and oh, too goody," with a gay laugh. "I shouldn't think you would ever find a flaw of which you *could* repent. Now, I am 'evil continually.'"

Yet very sweet, Ruth Garnier thought, gazing into the glad

child's face. They were so unlike, yet they always enjoyed each other's society exceedingly.

So the talk went on, while fate was coming nearer every moment. It is so strange and awesome to be approaching the great unseen which is to change the current of our lives and work us good or ill. Every day thousands of souls pass this point, stretching out eager hands.

Then a muffled sound of bells floated to them, for there was no resonance or elasticity in the air. Sylvia longed to run down with a glad cry of welcome, but she stood a little in awe of Mrs. McRae, and desired of all things to be proper.

"There's Doctor Trewartha's lovely, sunshiny face—he *is* handsome, Ruth, and—oh!"

She was silent so long, and so motionless that Ruth glanced curiously at her, and then out of the window. Doctor Trewartha was taking a burden in his arms, and a plainly-dressed woman stood beside him. In the sleigh behind were Janet McRae's tall figure and ample shoulders, and a young man.

"I must go down," Ruth said, slowly.

But Sylvia made no stir. She was wondering where she had seen that floating tawny hair, that clear-cut Greek profile, that proud air and carriage. Surely she had talked to him, watched the unconsciously imperious gestures.

Mrs. McRae came into the hall and kissed Ruth upon her cheek. Then the breezy voice swept up and down like a current of her own mountain air. Cheerful greetings to servants, inquiries, commands, all in a breath.

"Is the room ready, Martha? It will be best to take him up at once—he is so fatigued with the journey. Ruth, this is Mrs. Hurst, and her son. Be careful, Trewartha! Miss Garnier"—her eyes travelling from one to another even as her words.

Some strange impulse led Ruth to take the trembling hand, for Mrs. Hurst appeared frightened by all this stir and scurrying of servants. Perhaps, too, she wondered at her own temerity in venturing upon the friendship of Janet McRae.

They carried John Hurst to his room and disencumbered him of his wrappings. Trewartha was as gentle as if he had been a baby. The faded eyes thanked him with their wavering smile.

Ruth, in the meanwhile attended to Mrs. Hurst, and when they were in a fair way of being comfortable, Mrs. McRae carried her off to her own room, and heard in ten minutes the amount of news and business that had come under the girl's supervision.

To Sylvia the time was simply intolerable. What were they all doing and talking about? If she could only have another glimpse of the face to assist her memory. Was Mr. Hurst a terrible, helpless invalid? What would his wife be like?

All manner of disjointed fancies ran through her brain. Then the door opened.

"Sylvia, child, how do you do?" kissing her on the cheek as well. "So you've been helping Ruth keep house?"

"Not much help, I think," with a gay laugh.

"Mrs. Hurst, Sylvia Redmond."

A neat, delicate, commonplace woman, with nothing about her to offend in her soft gray stuff dress and linen collar and cuffs; but the meek, patient sorrow in her face went to Sylvia's heart.

"You were never in the old house, I think," Mrs. McRae began. "It bears its age better than we shall. What puny things we are compared to yonder mountain, or those giant oaks! Yet we have our own work to do—our own work," tapping the window-sill with her long forefinger.

Sylvia cared little about the work. She drew a chair for Mrs. Hurst, and then rolled an ottoman to Mrs. McRae's feet, seating herself.

"Tell me about New York," she said, "and Philadelphia, and—"

"You must ask Doctor Trewartha. It's a noisy Babel to me, full of sights and sounds, for which I at least have no

longing. Balls and theatres and shopping are out of my line as well. You and Ruth would see more in half an hour than I in a week. I am devoutly glad to get home, Midge; more rejoiced than you at going."

"I don't wonder that you are glad to come here. I am always, and it is not my home either. There's such a great, grand restfulness about it."

Janet McRae enclosed the child's face in her two hands, and gazed intently at the lustrous eyes. What an odd little thing it was, going to the depths of souls now and then, by one or two trenchant words. The strong old features softened to a smile.

It was almost dusk when Doctor Trewartha came down, followed by Victor. Mrs. McRae rang for lights, and bustled about as became the mistress in her own house. Mrs. Hurst spoke to her son, calling him by name.

"Victor!"

Sylvia Redmond looked again. Yes, it all came back to her now. The quaint Bohmerwald settlement, the festival with its moonlight and homely cheer, the fantastic musician, and Victor Hurst! He had forgotten her, but she should remember him among a thousand.

"Midge," Trewartha exclaimed, pinching the rosy cheek," what grave subject are you pondering? You are not at all glad to see me. You have not given me one word of welcome."

"You deserve to be punished for staying away so long."

"Is that it? Have you grown jealous?"

"Yes. Of him. You will like him better than you do me," in a soft whisper that reached only Ruth Garnier.

"He is a man and a companion, you know," with a twinkle in the mirthful eyes.

She crept closer, and slipped her hand within Doctor Trewartha's.

"Where did *she* find him?" with a dainty, meaning emphasis upon both pronouns.

"At Weareham."

"Accidentally?"

"Treason, conspiracy!" he whispered. "Is he handsome enough for your little ladyship?"

"*She* likes him?"

"Yes."

This had passed under cover of the moving about of lamps, stirring the fire, and a sort of general conversation between the others. Now supper was announced. Mrs. Hurst glanced at the Doctor half distressfully.

"He was sleeping very tranquilly, and there is no cause for anxiety. However, I will see."

He sprang up the stairs and down again before they were seated at the table. Sylvia had taken the place next to his. With a word he set Mrs. Hurst's fears at rest.

Sylvia was opposite Victor. Not a muscle of his face betrayed the slightest consciousness, though she little fancied that he was debating whether it would be prudent to recognize her by and by. He felt somewhat strange in this grand old dining-hall, with these high-bred ladies about him. For Sylvia, whatever her freedoms, carried herself like a little queen. It seemed as if she stood less in awe of Mrs. McRae than did Ruth. And then he wondered how they both came here—if it was their home as well?

Sylvia and Doctor Trewartha kept up a light skirmishing, Mrs. McRae throwing a heavy shell into the outworks now and then, which had the effect of drawing the combatants closer together for the next few moments.

Afterward Anah Hurst stole off to her husband. It was like some wild, happy dream to see him lying here amid this luxury, and to know the poverty he had faced so many years would never be his again. God had opened a door of escape for them all. So she prayed softly, and cried between the broken sentences.

Mrs. McRae was too tired for her old-fashioned game of

piquet; besides, she was in a speculative mood. Trewartha, with his usual fascinating geniality, caused these young people to assimilate as they would not have done in a month if left to themselves. He made Victor appear at his very best. The reading and thinking of the past two years, desultory as it had been, was not without some fruit.

Once Trewartha started up. "I really ought to go over to the Cedars," he said. "I dare say Hannah had my supper ready."

"You will do no such thing, Doctor Trewartha," Mrs. McRae returned, sharply, coming out of her reverie.

CHAPTER XVII.

"The whole thing is plain enough, friend Janet," mused Doctor Trewartha, lighting his pipe and settling himself in the great leather-backed chair, after he had retired to his "den." "If a woman has a daughter, or a niece, or a young person of any degree or kind, her thoughts run upon matrimony. She can never let nature or circumstances take their course. And Ruth Garnier—"

He blew out several whiffs of smoke and watched them curl between him and the drowsing fire-light. For seven years Ruth Garnier had lived at Cragness, the daughter of a dead friend left penniless at that early age, but fallen into generous hands. She had been cared for tenderly as a daughter, dressed elegantly, taken into such society as Mrs. McRae frequented—the best at Cragness, you might be sure. She had been carefully educated, accomplished in a certain sense. These years had been full of peculiar interest to Mrs. McRae; but when Ruth Garnier became a woman, the keenest of it began to flag.

The misfortune of it was, that she was only a woman, a proper, discreet, cool-blooded one, never likely to go out of the beaten paths. A friend and companion, a clear-sighted almoner, a judicious adviser if her counsel was needed; and having made her thus perfect, Janet McRae's work in this direction seemed to be at a stand-still.

She had never announced Ruth Garnier as her heir; but she had once said to Doctor Trewartha—"The man who takes her will have no dowerless maiden." She was past nineteen now, not young for her years, but at twenty-five she would be no older.

In hunting up these Hursts, Janet McRae had followed out something more than a whim.

After the strike at Weareham was well over, one of the least partisan journals of the place had read its lessons in what the editor considered a calm, dispassionate style. The leaders in the matter were severely denounced; and Victor Hurst, by reason of his youth and inexperience, was held up as a warning. The writer fancied that he knew the case so well. The lawless son of a poor clergyman, who, leaving the religion and conservatism of his father, had branched out into unbelief, radicalism, and violence, and audaciously placed himself at the head of the movement—weak, indeed, when it selected such a champion.

Janet McRae read the article through.

"There was an Anah McRae who married a Hurst, a very fair sort of man until he took up preaching. She was a distant connection."

"Hurst is not such an uncommon name," returned Doctor Trewartha.

"To be sure not."

The keen blue eyes studied the fallen embers on the hearth, though they saw something else. A helpless, paralytic man, a sad, broken-down woman, and a wayward son who would never be any comfort. She had a great, pitiful nature. Abundant means had enlarged rather than contracted it, and she thought now that some of her useless thousands that, but for Anah's testy father might have been hers, would perhaps keep them from starving. As for the young man, let him go his own gait to destruction if he so willed.

She learned that this was the same John Hurst who had married her kinswoman. Then she was seized with an irresistible desire to see them all. The unconfessed longing and ambition of her life had been to have a son; and it seemed to her even now that this young man might be snatched from ruin if he

should prove worth saving. Before her visit she had made herself acquainted with the main incidents of their lives.

To Doctor Trewartha the project appeared a crazy one; but he had in some sense grown to be an elder son to her, and, as she said, her right-hand man. He would as soon have thought of his own mother travelling around in the dead of winter as she; and though at first he tried to persuade her that the business in New York could wait until pleasanter weather, when he saw how resolute she was, he packed his portmanteau and started, as most of the medical practice was in the hands of Doctor Greaves at the village.

They had both been a good deal surprised in Victor Hurst. No coarse, illiterate, violent demagogue, to hang around low haunts and incite weaker souls to mutiny. There was some far back reason for his course, Doctor Trewartha felt, but the young man was oddly uncommunicative about all pertaining to his inner life.

Doctor Trewartha, laughing now in his amused way, saw the end from the beginning. Victor would be master here some day, with Ruth Garnier for wife.

The broad brow knitted itself into a little frown, as if the current of lazily-flowing blood had met with some minute yet vexing obstruction. Doctor Trewartha possessed a fine physique and a noble mind, which might have towered above his compeers, but for the indolent, sensuous temperament. He impressed you by a suggestion of power that he might exert, but somehow never did. He cultivated art a little; occasionally took a spasmodic interest in politics, or wrote an odd, daring essay, following out some whim rather than honest theory; and laughed at the world's comments and credulousness. For the rest, fortune had showered her best gifts upon him; and with a liberal income, he could indulge both whims and indolence. Forty years of age now, a widower, with a phantom of a brief married life in the far back years.

Why should he object to any of these arrangements? True, Janet McRae fancied she kept the latter part of her secret well, and would not be likely to ask any advice upon that point; but he had seen it in her complacent eyes. He knew of what she persuaded herself. The cool calmness and ripe judgment of Ruth Garnier would hold the impulsive, unequally-balanced nature of Victor Hurst in check; but what was to stir *her* to the heights of enthusiasm? to warm her blood into the current of royal crimson, without which a woman's soul never reaches its true height and capacity?

Did some other thought cross his mind?

"Pooh!" shaking the ashes out of his pipe, and balancing the amber mouth-piece between his fingers, "why should old blood seek to warm itself with passion-heats? And if she should never know—why then the sense of incompleteness could not torture. And what are dreams that in a brief while scorch their way through to gray, bitter ashes!"

"Yes," he went on, after a long pause, "let him have Cragness: it is his right. And Ruth as well."

Rain had set in during the night. The air was soft and murky, the clouds seeming to rest on the tree-tops. Yet before the slow dawn there was a stir of busy life about the old house. Victor started when the great bell in the hall rang up the maids and men in the farther wing, and slept no more, but listened to the sounds that reached him indistinctly, trying to realize the change. When he had promised his mother not to refuse any good gift that might be offered, he had hardly imagined one so bountiful; not that he at all suspected what was so patent to Doctor Trewartha. He had come thither for business, and for his mother's sake. If she should find a true friend and a home until he could make her one, it was all he asked.

After breakfast they took a ramble around the old house. Spacious rooms, odd nooks, out of the way corners, a great

tower at the end opposite the servants' wing, full of old treasures or rubbish, and a view from the top that, in clear weather, was unsurpassed.

Victor's strangeness began to wear off a little. They were all so genial. And it must be confessed that, for the first time in his life, he felt himself of true and near kin to wealth, refinement, and education. If fate had cast his lot here in the beginning! But let him keep this fact steadily before him—he had come here to work. He had no other right.

Somehow, at last he found himself alone with Sylvia Redmond. There was a deep recess-window at one end of the long hall, and thinking it a turn, having seen her crimson morning-dress vanish that way a few moments before, he followed.

She was perched on the sill after the fashion of a kitten.

"Oh," she exclaimed, with a little laugh, while a rosy color, like a clear dawn, fluttered over the sweet, beguiling face.

He flushed deeply, and began to stammer some excuse.

"Oh, no matter. I was watching those gray-hooded mountains yonder. How much of the storm they gather in their arms. Shall you like Cragness, think? It is so much more inviting on a clear day. Or perhaps cities are more to your taste?"

"No," briefly, looking out of the window rather than at her; "I have small love for cities. Cragness is a grand old place—like its mistress."

"Your mother and she are cousins?"

"Not so near kin as that," in his honest, straightforward way. "In fact, the relation is so slight that it gives us no claim. Mrs. McRae offered me employment here, and I came."

"Are you going to take charge of the mill?"

"I do not know, yet."

She glanced timidly at him. He had changed, matured since that summer night long ago. And worst of all, he had

forgotten her. There was a latent coquettish instinct in her nature, and the handsome, imperious face roused it. Could she let him glide over into Miss Garnier's keeping without a word? At that she bit her lip. What had Janet McRae to do with the disposal of this man's soul?

It was only her well-grounded suspicion, and yet it made her as angry as if it had been announced to her as a warning.

"Where is the quarry?" he asked, showing that his thoughts flowed in a different channel from hers.

"Down by the village. But that—"

"But what, Miss Redmond?" with a little confused pride wandering up to his brow as he spoke.

"You are not going there? You will not work—" pausing abruptly.

He remembered so well the dainty pride she had displayed in the other interview, the aristocracy of birth and pureness of blood that had been her starting-points. And then she had admired the Gilliats—that puny, insolent, unprincipled, puppy. He would let her know that he did not consider himself anything to her or her kind. There was a great gulf between them, and he had no desire to bridge it over, no feverish wish to become an equal, until he stood fairly on the other side, by his own merit. Even then the dark shadow would throw itself over all the future. No, they could *never* meet on the same plane.

This pretty, playful trifling, was a part of her nature. She would have liked him to acknowledge it in the pleasant, deferential way that most gentlemen did—to confess the other meeting, and admit that he had remembered her. And she also wanted him to feel his importance as possible heir to Cragness.

"Work!" abruptly, making the lines more tense about his mouth; "that is what I came to do. As well in a quarry as in a foundry, for aught I see. I have been used to it all my life, so far."

"But your father was a clergyman, and a—"

"Not a gentleman, in your acceptation of the term," almost roughly. "Never rich, plain in his education, going daily among the poor and ignorant, and accustomed to sights and sounds that would shock your fine nerves."

"But doing God's work," she said, with a sudden heat. "Perhaps in the other country that counts for more than Norman blood."

He made a sudden sharp gesture of pain, though it looked more like scorn to her. She could not see the anguish that tore his heart. God only knew how glad he would be to come here as John Hurst's lawful and honorable son.

"The poverty remains about the same, and a poor man must depend upon his own exertions. Besides, I have my parents to care for."

"But Mrs. McRae—"

"Mrs. McRae has only this much to do with it—if I cannot find employment here, I must go elsewhere. I shall not presume upon so distant a kinship."

"But she is very kind. She has assisted those who had no claim upon her. And you—"

"I have none," he interrupted, coldly.

She glanced in some perplexity at the handsome, irritable, secretive face. Did he mean to make nothing of this tie, but put himself on a level with the workmen at the mill? And this, when Mrs. McRae had shown him all attention since he came into the house.

He turned away then. She let him go, vexed with him, vexed with herself, and pained in some dim way that she could not analyze, though her gift was to feel rather than argue. And it was not for her to tell him that he might be the heir if he was so stupid that he could not see.

Still, she felt as if she had been hurt; and drawing herself up until her round dimpled chin rested upon her knees, she shed a few childish tears, making no move until she heard a ringing voice floating out of the library, and a step coming nearer.

"Ah, Midge, what are you doing here? Upon my word you have been crying!"

"I crying!" with a disdainful stretch of the neck, as if she would have made herself a good head taller. "Why, Doctor Trewartha!"

He caught her up, gave her an impatient swing that brought her face on a level with his, and kissed it.

"Salt instead of sweet;" shaking his head. "Come to confession, Midge. Are you homesick? Shall I take you back to cousin Braisted's when I go?"

"When will that be?" with a saucy smile.

"In about an hour."

"And you are really going away?" dolefully.

"Why not? Don't you suppose Hannah wants to see me, and Bruno, and Tiff, and the rest?"

"But it rains."

"What of that?" shrugging his shoulders. "Then you will not go?"

"Of course not. How foolish of you. As if you did not know that I liked it ever so much better here than at cousin Braisted's. When are you coming back?"

"Oh, I shall be over by mid-afternoon. I am to take young Hurst with me."

"Doctor Trewartha, he is a surly, ungracious bear!" in her most emphatic manner.

"That is because you are jealous, Midge, and see him with green eyes;" and he laughed gayly.

"I don't like him."

"Then I shall not be put to the trouble of being jealous. There is always some comfort to be extracted from the law of compensation."

Ruth Garnier passing through the hall heard her announcement, and his reply. She carried them up-stairs to her room while she put fresh flowers in her vase and looked up some fine needlework, and then brought them down again. Trewartha

and Sylvia had settled themselves to a game of chess, as a farewell benizon.

She studied them vaguely for the first time. She and Sylvia were so widely different, something besides the integral difference of woman and child. She had none of these pretty heats and passions, the quick-coming smiles, the nervous grace, and sweet low laughs. Ah, that made Victor Hurst look up and wince as if it had stung him somewhere. He was younger than Doctor Trewartha, handsomer—why had not youth and beauty an affinity for each other? And suddenly she felt old and gray, as if a chill had come over her whole life.

"Check!" with a daring, impertinent little laugh. "Doctor Trewartha, you play miserably this morning."

"I am a month out of practice. There, you cruel girl, take king, queen, pawn, everything. Come, Victor, I hear the pawing and snuffing of our steeds below. Make your adieus hastily."

Sylvia barely nodded. Mrs. McRae left her great account-book and went out in the hall to charge them to be back by four at the latest. She looked at Victor as he sprang into the wagon,—the sleighing had rapidly disappeared through the night. Already she felt proud of him, and a strange nearness was springing up in her heart. Although she still grumbled about his beauty, she smiled as he shook the rain-drops from his shining hair.

"It is odd where it came from," she said to herself. "They were a hardy, plain, ungraceful race—the women barely endurable, and never a handsome man in the lot. Something from the Hurst side," and straightway she felt a little jealous.

Sylvia turned the leaves of her book discontentedly, looked out at the gray, dismal landscape, and finally found her way up-stairs, where Mrs. Hurst sat keeping her invalid husband company.

He was none the worse for his journey. Indeed, under Doctor Trewartha's treatment, he certainly had begun to

improve. His mind was clearer, his memory more distinct, and strength returned slowly.

Sylvia took a great liking to Mrs. Hurst, and the two gossipped for an hour or more,—harmless little interchanges of beliefs, sentiments, with now and then some reference to the past life on one side, and Cragness or Mrs. McRae on the other.

Supper was ready when the travellers returned. The day had been an era in Victor Hurst's life. Equal companionship with a man like Doctor Trewartha, stores of art and literature opened before him, bits of science flashing out here and there that, though it made him feel his own ignorance the more keenly, roused him like a strong clang of martial music. He had known nothing like this hitherto. His father's position had not been the one in which such minds are gathered, and the Lowndeses, with their fussy, under-bred pretensions, were positively incapable of appreciating such a gentleman.

So when he entered the supper-room, erect and manly, his head thrown back a little, his lips half parted with the peculiar satisfaction looking so like a smile, crowned with his bright hair, and the seal of spirit and intelligence upon his broad brow, Janet McRae envied the quiet little woman opposite, longing to go up and throw her arms around his neck and call him son—a son of the house indeed. Why had she not thought of the Hursts long ago?

She was in wonderful spirits that evening, and kept him by her side most of the time. So Sylvia and Doctor Trewartha played chess and flirted abominably: she in her eager child's fashion, he in the half-fatherly, half-teasing manner so natural to him. For in his mind Sylvia Redmond would always be the little child he had carried through a long and dangerous illness at her cousin Braisted's, while her fashionable mother was enjoying the gay world. And he used to think sometimes if fate had given him just such a daughter—never such a wife.

But Ruth Garnier, not knowing that, sat with her calm, white, unmoved face, joining the talk now and then when appealed to by Mrs. McRae, and at others listening to the dull thud, thud in her heart, and wondering for the first time if it was to go on with all that gnawing pain until she were eighty.

For a week it rained. Sometimes a torrent, at others a drizzle, carrying off at last the muddy remnants of snow from the roads and fields, leaving only a faint line beside the edge of the forest and under the fences. The air had softened to spring mildness, and when the sun came out at last you could almost believe it May.

That morning Sylvia went home, after urgent entreaties from the three Misses Braisted. Doctor Trewartha settled her snugly in his wagon and wrapped her well with the lap-blanket, that her bright soft dress might not be spattered with the mud. She had kissed Mrs. McRae and Ruth, and nodded carelessly to Victor Hurst. Every day there had been some sharp little contest between them, growing more covert, and perhaps more bitter; all because he chose to put so wide a distance between them; all because he had not opened the flower-garden of his heart and let her pluck or despoil as she chose. Of course that great grim ogress,—she had been kissing the firm, soft, and hardly wrinkled cheek not a moment ago—meant to marry him to Ruth.

Well, let them do as they liked.

"Well," Doctor Trewartha said, when they had gone half their distance, "no tears yet? My pretty speeches of comfort are fast melting into the chaos of unlimited thought again"

"Why should I cry?" scornfully.

"It is an old trick of womankind, my dear. I do not like to see you so much more stoical than the rest of your sex."

"You are laughing at me. Well, I am sorry to go away from Mrs. Hurst,—she is so sweet and sad, and has had a life full of trials," over which Sylvia sighed. "But the rest—"

"Well, the rest? Are you out of Madame Janet's good graces?"

There was a peculiar look in Doctor Trewartha's keen, perplexing eyes.

"I am neither out nor in," with a half indignant emphasis. "They are all so full of their own concerns now," impatiently dragging up the blanket. "He will marry her, of course;" with a wise and piquant nod.

"Marry—who?"

"Oh, you see it all, Doctor Trewartha; I have watched you sometimes studying Miss Garnier's face,—it is handsome enough, only it has no soul in it; and I know you have thought of it—you could not help it. She means them to marry. She places them together everywhere. And they are puppets!" with a flush of indignation. "I guessed at the plan before you all came, and told Ruth."

"What did she say?" and Trewartha's voice was husky.

"Say? nothing. Her slow brain is just like her solid flesh. The one loves ease, comfort, luxury, and the other rarely takes the trouble to think for itself."

"Midge, I thought you loved her? Do women so underrate their friends?"

"I do love her," with a trembling passionate emphasis. "I don't want to underrate her. She is good and tender; but to like a man—at another's bidding—"

"Is a heinous crime."

Something in his deep tone startled her. She was flushed and nervous, and began picking at her glove-fingers.

"You fancy she could do this, Midge?"

"She will, I know. Well, why should she not—out of gratitude?"

"And he—but you do not like him over well?"

She flushed deeper at this, and the drooping lids trembled over her cheek, but she thought her face most calm and reticent.

"Well, child," he said, a little sharply, "we have nothing to do with their fates."

"Nothing."

"So let us leave the guessing alone. Mrs. McRae knows her own mind best."

"But it is patent to every one."

"Pooh, child!"

With that he reined up the horse, handed her out, and spent ten minutes in Miss Rachel Braisted's quaint parlor, listening to the low-voiced thee and thou, and the choicely-expressed thanks for his courtesy.

He let the reins lay loosely over the horse's neck as he went on, dropping his broad shoulders, and allowing his eyes to stray out to the dim distance of the horizon.

"It is time there came a break in the play for you, Midge; but after all, yours is only a child's changeful fancy. What is that compared to what might be a man's strong love?"

Above, the blue sky was flecked with tiny fleets of white shadows sailing to unknown seas. How calm and tranquil! If life would flow on like that! He so liked ease and indolence and pleasant cheer. He liked to go over to Cragness, and have a half-laughing, half-satirical argument with Mrs. McRae, and watch Ruth Garnier budding slowly, like some great white creamy lily. He had promised himself a rare treat in the blossoming.

"But is it worth the trouble?" he mused. "I should want to rouse the flame, the fine spirit,—and why should I torment myself again with passion dreams? Youth to youth—that is best. Let her plans prosper."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Victor and Ruth had watched Sylvia's departure,—the one with a feeling of relief, the other, pain. During the ten days she had exercised a very peculiar influence over Victor Hurst. She either ignored or had forgotten the past,—the latter, he believed; and she took every opportunity to enforce the distinction between them. He, a poor clergyman's son, had small right to aspire to even the merest friendship. She had shown him that.

And yet how deliciously sweet she had been to the others: to his mother, to his poor father. He could hear her voice now as she had sat singing in the twilight. They all treated her as a pretty, spoiled child; but to him, she had been a lofty, scornful woman.

There was a soreness in his heart that led him to exaggerate every little act. Yet his ambition was not all dead. Some day he would stand before her, having won at least one of the great prizes of life. He would ask nothing from her then, only prove that a man without birth or wealth could attain to some height.

But Ruth, in her slow way, beat her breast mentally, and cried—"Why am I so unlike other women? Why does Doctor Trewartha smile if she but raises her dainty hand, and watch the light coming and going in her eyes, as if it brought tidings from an unseen world?"

For she had a consciousness that her eyes never kindled, that her voice never fell into soft inflections, that the pretty, picturesque turns of head and hand, the trick of smile and blush, were rarely hers. And this was what men liked.

She turned abruptly from the window, hurt and chilled by the revelations of herself. Her habits hitherto had been of external perception and appreciation only, and she had never comprehended her inner self, or indeed thought of that self or its needs.

Left alone, Victor Hurst glanced up at Mrs. McRae, who had gone back to her writing. This private account she always kept herself. A thorough, methodical, business woman, who would not rest while anything was left at loose ends.

He came and stood by her, noted the strong, sinewy frame, the fresh, healthy skin, the mane of white hair which had never been fine, but was still so abundant that she wore no cap, and the long fingers grasping the pen. The writing was like herself, large and clear rather than handsome, and with no tremulous lines such as women of her age usually made.

She finished the page, glanced up, and said, inquiringly, "Well?"

He did not tremble now at the sharp ring in her voice, nor the steady look of the keen blue eyes.

"I want to talk to you."

"Sit down, sit down;" in her commanding way.

"No, I prefer to stand." He felt more independent there in his full height before her.

She waited for him to go on. She almost guessed what was in his mind, but he should have no help from her.

"You remember, when we spoke of my coming, that I—that—" and he stumbled sadly in his desire not to offend, to be as polite and suave as Doctor Trewartha—"that I came to work."

"But surely a brief holiday can be tolerated?" in a rather softer voice than usual.

"Mine has not been brief. Since the middle of November I have not done anything."

She paused to consider, a rare thing with her; but Trewartha

had said, warningly, "Be careful how you proceed, if you are really anxious to attach him to yourself."

"I have been looking over the mill," he began. "I do not think I am needed there. The business is carried on admirably."

There was a touch in this that won her; it was so like appreciation.

"Yes;" nodding her large, well-shaped head. "Yes, I think I can prove that women possess some administrative talent. You have been round the village?"

"Yes. With Doctor Trewartha."

"I wanted to take you myself, but I have been so busy, and the roads were wretched, though I did not mind that so much. I pride myself upon that settlement. I have solved some of the difficult questions, I believe;" with a touch of triumph. "The hands down there are paid fair wages, and get them regularly every Saturday night. Their rents are reasonable, their living is not subject to many fluctuations, for a market there is better than one twenty or a hundred miles distant, as I have finally beaten it into our farmers' narrow brains. There is a good school, a church, but no rum shops."

"You are right in that respect."

"Yes," biting the end of her pen-holder reflectively. "The greater part of the misery in the world comes from dram-drinking. I put my foot down there!" and she thrust it out with a forcible gesture. "It leads to idleness, thriftlessness, crime, in both men and women. I have had some cases of insubordination; but no man stays there unless he can work and behave himself. Then the way is easy enough. There is no poor-house needed, there are no paupers, and yet it is not because the wages are high. The working-classes need *just* enough. Too much begets extravagance and indolence."

"It is difficult to tell what is just enough for every one."

"I think not—I think not!" repeating the words with emphasis.

"One man may have sickness, bad luck, loss of employment—"

"There is no such here," she interrupted. "I have kept the mill running two winters when there was no demand, simply that the men might not fall into idle habits, or have an excuse for discontent. If they want to go, they are quite free so to do; but they shall not stay here and incite others to rebellion." And the blue eyes sparkled with vigorous determination.

"You could do it on a small scale," he said; "but you would fail on a larger plan."

"Fail! And why?" She rapped her knuckles on the edge of the old-fashioned mahogany desk, and her clear cheek flushed.

"It is not controlling a hundred or two; it's thousands of every kind. A good, steady, sober man may, after all, be an indifferent workman; and a miserable sot, who will not work more than three days in a week, may be able to do you more real good. You have to allow for such cases. Then in cities rents are high, provisions fluctuate, coal is often very expensive, and the poor crowd in any kind of places where they can find shelter."

"But why will they all rush to the cities?"

Victor smiled oddly, and yet with a little contempt.

"Because there is work for them to do in cities."

"There would be as much work in the country if men would stay and do it."

"I think not. Capital goes where it can find the best investment, make the most money on the smallest outlay. How long has your mill been in successful operation?"

"Twelve years since I have managed it alone. It was at loose ends before."

"And how much money have you made?"

She was startled a little at the straightforward question

"I did not set out to make money," sharply.

"That is the difference. A man who did not need money would not soil his aristocratic fingers with trade;" a bitter smile playing about his lips. "And the man who means to make it, grinds up everything which comes in his way—bodies, souls, wives, and children. They come at his beck when there's plently to do, and at other times half starve, or crowd alms-houses and police-stations."

"And drink bad rum. They're an improvident, thriftless set. Why, down yonder there's scarcely a man but has a bank account."

"And in the cities some of them own their houses. They are not all so careless as you think; but still you cannot have them all cast in the same mould. There's immigration and the continual change the—forces working against them hardly balanced by those working for them. And the dull times—"

"Victor," she began, decisively, "there are men in large cities who carry on business at a sacrifice even in dull times."

"And how?" his cheek flushing. "They cut down wages because they say there is no demand; and for three or six months get their work done for two-thirds its value. Then business stirs up, and they are first in the field to reap the advantage."

"But they kept their men from starving through a long winter, mayhap."

"Let them call things by their right name, then. Business and sharp practice is one thing, philanthropy another."

"But it could be made to agree by skilful management."

She was so proud of her success that she thought she could rule a state. Her keen eyes sparkled with latent vigor.

"It is a greater question than you think. I once fancied that I could help solve it."

"And made a miserable flash;" with a harsh laugh, as if there was something in his discomfiture to enjoy.

"Yes," wincing and shivering, but trying to bite the color back into his lips. "In our case, it was just as I said. There

were at least six months' orders on hand, but trade in many places was dull. Norcross could have gone on paying the wages; and heaven knows it was likely to be a hard winter, with coal and provisions so high. So the employers thought it was their turn, and he joined with the rest. Why shouldn't he? It was his side," smiling bitterly.

"And if you men had gone on, waiting till spring—?"

"The strike would have been successful then. But you forget—we did not ask for more—only the same. We found it hard enough to manage on that; at least the men with wives and children did."

He turned partly away from her now. She ran her eyes briefly over the tall figure, so firm, supple, and graceful; the purely-cut features, with their strength and beauty, that could never detract from vigor and force, for all the nose was so slender and sensitive, the skin fine and clear as a girl's, the hair silken soft.

"No," he said, after a moment's perplexity; "you do not know anything about it. The world, after all, is so great, though the little cycles may be much alike, so much that they deceive one. And we are all so strangely connected. A man raises his hand and puts a whole city in motion; and his deed for good or evil reacts upon thousands. Our minds are so narrow, and there are many influences that we cannot grasp."

She saw the dreamy eyes resting on the far blue mountains, with a look in them she could not fathom; and aught that baffled her keen vision annoyed her.

"Well," she went on, with a kind of bitter energy, "that part of your life has proved a failure. You'll turn a new leaf here. It is a mystery to me, though, how John Hurst came to put you at a trade. Was it your fancy?" eyeing him sharply.

"It was not my fancy—no."

"How then?"

"We were poor, of course. If we had been rich—" with a vision of Doctor Trewartha before him. "And he did not

exactly know what to do with me. It is hard to look into a soul so unlike your own—"

She thought of the contrast between him and John Hurst, and wanted to believe that the pride of a long line of ancestry had culminated in him : McRae blood, of course.

"He did the best he knew. I shall always say that for him, now," fiercely, as if some one had challenged the statement. "I suppose I was wild, headstrong, unreasoning. The four years' discipline would be good for me, he thought. So I was put at something my whole soul loathed."

She saw it in the distended nostrils, where the fine red veins came so suddenly to the surface; in the firmly-set scarlet mouth ; the little frown contracting the brows.

"Well?" She was elated to have him tell the story of his life over to her, for he had hitherto been so reticent.

"There were some good men in the shop, some who were low and ignorant ; but they made amends in brawn and skill. There was laughing, coarse jesting, songs, and treats. You gave your ten hours' work amid smoke, and grime, and noise, and felt vilely unclean at night, at least I did : tired in brain and body. The offset to this was a good business at which you could get work when times were brisk and shops not over-crowded. I believe I hated the rabble."

She always scouted the idea of aristocracy. The McRaes had been plain untitled people, and she was a thorough old democrat ; yet she liked the flash of pride in the last of the McRaes, the heir of the broad lands.

"I meant to go away when I was through."

"Where? What did you expect to do?"

"My mind was not quite clear. I had a friend there—well," thrusting down the old phantoms—"I could not leave—*him.*" Somehow he felt that he should stumble over the word "father" just now, with her hawk's eyes upon him. For though his face was partially turned away, he knew that she was minutely inspecting it.

"You were a good son in that respect, and I think filial gratitude hardly one of the modern virtues. You will have your reward."

"He cared for me in my infancy. It is simple payment I mean, not reward."

She twisted the leaves of her book absently. Ready and straightforward, even to rudeness, as she often was, she hesitated a little here.

He was thinking over the other miserable failure, the time he had fancied himself a genius, and the bitter awakening.

"So when I could not have culture, refinement, time for study, and all that; when I found my place was in the ranks with the others, I made a desperate strike for myself and them, and was worsted. That is all. I am ready to begin anew. I shall not soon quarrel with fate."

She had a secret misgiving, from the repressed look in his face and the determined closing of the lips, that it was *not* all.

"I am ready for my work," in a low resolute tone.

It was her turn now. She shut the book with an impatient force, as if it had offended her.

"Victor Hurst," she began, clearing her throat and raising her neck out of the folds of lace that she always wore inside her dress, "I had a purpose in bringing you hither. I think your father made a mistake in choosing a distasteful occupation for you; but we will not quarrel with that since it has made us friends, or at least been the means of drawing us together. I never had son or daughter, and I believe your mother and myself are the last of a long line."

A dim fear seized upon Victor, and his heart beat almost to suffocation.

"I ask you, therefore, to carry on the family name in this old place after I am sleeping down there in the graveyard of the McRaes."

His face flushed a deep and painful crimson, and there was a constriction in his throat, as if a serpent were winding its

strangling coils around. A mad, desperate pang at his heart, a fiery heat in every pulse, and a sense of bitter, bitter loss by no fault of his own.

She misread it for embarrassment, surprise, and gratitude. Rising she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Yes," she exclaimed, with a touch of emotion, bowing her stately head a little, "be my son as well as hers. I am not given to the frequent asking of favors."

She had not imagined anything like this. She was to be stately, impressive; bestow her good gifts with the grandeur of a queen, and have him the grateful, humble recipient. Instead, a strange touch of longing, unfulfilled motherhood, that made her the suppliant as it were.

For an instant a fierce, passionate tide swept over him—a current so strong that he unconsciously bowed his head, while his face turned ashen gray. Oh, if he might take these honors, this home, that he had learned to love already. If there were no vile, hateful stain to mar the past.

He thrust down the spasm of anguish with a fierce gesture. It was so terrible, so maddening.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "why do you ask this? What do you know of me, to be willing to place that much in a stranger's hands? Wait. Try me. I may offend in a thousand things. You have been too hasty."

"Perhaps I have," hurt by his abrupt manner, and the utter absence of tenderness or gratitude; "but I meant to give you —the work and duties of a son."

"I am not ready for them," almost brusquely. "And you trust too easily. I have failed in other undertakings, and I dare not accept such risks. No, I dare not," shaking his tawny mane like a wild beast at bay.

"We will wait, then," she returned, with a touch of the old sharpness. She was not used to being thwarted and refused in this manner. This young fellow whom she had rescued from —and his helpless parents up-stairs—

Yet she started at some hidden pain in the tense lines of his face, and the pale, compressed lips, as if a vital chord had been jarred roughly.

"Try me first," he said, with a hoarse undertone in his voice, and his hands working nervously. "Perhaps I should not be fitted for the life."

And this when every instinct of his soul cried out for it. Secretly, in the far depths, he cursed the restless rebellion that had been the cause of it all. If he had never known his mother's secret! If he could stand here and meet Janet McRae's clear eyes as John Hurst's lawful son! But to come with a base falsehood in his soul, something that the world called shame, and that she would shrink from—no, it could not be done.

"Very well." She cleared her voice angrily, and there was a feverish heat in her eyes. "I received this letter yesterday—taking one from her desk—"there was some talk of it last summer. If I undertake it there must be a capable and efficient man placed in charge. There is money in the quarry, I know."

He studied the letter. A large Romish church was to be built in the adjoining town, and this being the nearest quarry, as well as containing stone of the required quality, a proposition had been forwarded to Mrs. McRae.

"I am no judge of such matters," briefly; "but I think I could attend to the business part. Was it a kind of overseer you needed?"

"Yes," biting off her word. "There might be something pleasanter."

"Few men work for pleasure, I think. I desire to make a home for my parents—forgive me, but I do not want them to be a burden on your charity."

"My charity?" with a sound of scorn in the voice, "I suppose I can do what I like with my own? And who, pray, has a better claim on it than my cousin?"

"No one, perhaps, when it comes to that," he replied, with

the bluntness of truth. "It was for *her* sake that I consented. You have been very kind—" his voice faltering over the ache and agony within, the secret wrong and silent endurance—"and it is right that I should tell you—when I can be spared, I expect to go away. I may be gone years."

There was a perceptible quiver about her rather heavy lips, that now, when she was vexed, lost the rosy hue of their far back youth. Go away when she had brought him here as a stay for her old age? Why, how unthankful he was!

Yet her usual presence of mind did not desert her even if she had lost her temper. She prided herself upon managing men, and her life had been a series of successes. She was shrewd and discriminating, and in her silent way fathomed many a secret, as if, after all, most secrets were not merely a question of time, and sooner or later cried on the house-tops. Meaning to rule this man's soul in the end, she resigned herself with a semblance of patience now.

"It is time, then, that we were about this," she said, with her olden briskness. "Laborers must be hunted up, and the whole thing put in working order. You will take the charge?"

"So far as I am able," bowing his head.

"I must see Trewartha immediately;" and ringing the bell, she ordered the carriage.

He was a little disappointed that she did not ask him to accompany her. He watched her gather up the reins in her strong hand, encased in its fine buckskin driving-glove; for she had a dainty lady's refinement in some matters. When she was out of sight he went up-stairs to his mother, striving on the way to thrust out of sight all traces of the pain that had so bitterly wrenched his soul.

The two rooms opened into one another, and made a long, pleasant vista. John Hurst had been drawn to the farthest window, and was looking out in a half-dreamy, vacant way. It was strange to think how much he had softened; and though he sometimes expressed a little misgiving about accepting all

this luxury when there were so many needy ones in the world, Anah would say—

"I am sure you deserve something for your life of sacrifice and toil. I am glad it has come to you."

"We deserve nothing but wrath for our sins and unfaithfulness. It is His mercy only."

Then Anah would wonder how she dared to feel so happy and at ease. Was God more generous than this man had taken Him to be? She began to think so, now that she was out of the wearing round of poverty and sin, so closely connected indeed.

Victor came and spoke gently to his father, who clasped the firm young hand in his so withered and trembling. Now and then some little touch of love almost unmanned his soul. In his unreason and ignorance he had blundered so stupidly. If he could only go back two years!

His mother saw the secret significance in his face, and when he went through to his own chamber, followed him.

They not unfrequently held little confidences here in a low tone, for John Hurst's hearing had failed him perceptibly, and they had a feeling of perfect security within their own apartments.

He hurried briefly over Mrs. McRae's proposal.

"If it could be!"

There was a little longing and clinging in the mother's heart. It was the pleasant, genial, yet bracing atmosphere that her son needed. He looked like a very prince to her eyes, standing there in his manly beauty. Why must he go down with the hedgers and ditchers of life because she had unwittingly chanced to believe in one man's falsehood?

"But it cannot." He took the hand that dropped so helplessly by her side tenderly in his. "It cannot, you know. Peculiar as she is, and little given to respecting many of the world's opinions, still honor is honor with her, and truth truth. I don't know that she would forgive either weakness

or cowardice. Could *we* stay with our secret told? and oh, I need not ask you if we could stay with it untold."

"No;" plucking weakly at his sleeve, a terrified light wavering in her soft dark eyes.

"It seems as if I had learned so much in a few months;" his voice singularly calm and sad. "I thought last summer that I could fight against God and fate; indeed, I made myself believe there was no God but human will. I know now that there is something stronger."

"There is, there is!" longing to, and yet unable to explain it.

"There is something in me that I want to work out when I find a fair chance. No, it's not the painting;" with a ghostly sort of smile. "Going through Doctor Trewartha's house quenched the last lingering ray of that conceit. I do not envy Lowndes now. Let him glory in his small triumphs. Some day I believe that I shall find a voice for the great dumb ache in my heart. There are many years before me."

Her eager, devouring eyes assented, for her tongue seemed dry and powerless.

"I told her that I meant to go away. I will not deceive her into any act of generosity. If I can keep a comfortable home for you while *he* lives, and study myself a little, it is all I ask now. Then you can go with me or—stay—"

"I am your mother;" with a little cry of pain, half smothered in its birth. "I can never forget what I have brought upon you."

"Hush, dear," taking her in his strong arms, "some day maybe we shall see the use of it, though we can only grope among thorns now. I was proud, self-willed, daring, putting my own wisdom above all other, as I told you. Perhaps it was right that this should come upon me, to teach me the better to appreciate his life of sacrifice. I can understand now why he felt it such a sacred duty to watch over me."

"Yes, he knew what might be feared," in a furtive, anxious way.

"He knew what I inherited. I suppose he saw the devil often—" with a short, bitter laugh. "He would not want me to mistake it for an angel;" remembering how proud he had been of his fine, lofty, restless instincts.

"He did his best."

"I believe you—and him. A different life might have rendered him less morbidly conscientious, but he was good, earnest. And we will do our duty to the very end, not like slaves who bear a chain about with them, but from a higher motive. After that, if you elect to share my fate, we will never be separated. It will not be the old, foolish rambling with Paul Latour."

So God had answered her prayer and given her back her boy! As if to balance the exquisite thrill, another fear entered her brain.

"Did you offend Mrs. McRae? She has been so generous!" with a remorseful strand in her voice.

"I believe I disappointed her sorely. Mother, when it comes to the last we will tell her the truth. For where we shall go it will be blotted out forever."

She drew a hard, repressed breath.

"And if I can make the quarry a success," hopefully. "I mean that she shall lose nothing by us."

CHAPTER XIX.

Janet McRae stood by the table in Doctor Trewartha's "study," as Hannah called it; but any place that held him long at a time was always a "den" to him. This was a curious conglomeration. An elegant Persian carpet, in the smallest of figures but most gorgeous colors, so strewn with débris of every kind, that here and there a patch of it gleamed out like a stray bird of brilliant kind in the wildness of some rugged mountain slope.

It was very large, running on the south side the entire length of the house. Quaintly-carved bookcases and mediæval cabinets curiously inlaid, filled the niches made between the windows. They were packed with a traveller's relics from the weird idols of some long-ago religion, coins, mosaics, cameii ensculptured with gold and ivory, antique bronzes, cups, vases, and gems from unearthed cities, to the illuminated missals and black-letter poems of a later date. Marbles, bronzes, and great Indian vases filled with tropical plants and wide feathery fronds of fern; cacti in scarlet, pink, and yellow; here a great circle, like the basin of a fountain, filled with creamy waxen callas and a variety of sedge-grass, growing amid cool, odorous darkness. Pictures of every clime; plumy tufts of palm, with desert sounds in the distance; groups of picturesque Arabs, intent upon some story of adventure: each swarthy, eager face a study in itself; smiling lakes and twilights; a fierce storm scene; Spanish vineyards, with their glowing purple bloom, and dark-eyed women, the chill of the snowy Alps, and the drowse of the blue Mediterranean. For weeks you might study them and never tire.

Here the skin of a royal tiger was thrown over a chair to cushion it, or a pile of pillows improvised into a lounge, glittering with the gold and yellow of some slain leopard. Brackets made from deer-antlers, grotesque powder-horns, inlaid pistols and trophies of many a wild ramble mingled in almost interminable confusion; but Doctor Trewartha at his ease among them all.

"So, you intend to tempt him with a woman?" laughing carelessly, while a kind of dangerous light played around the eyes.

"I mean that he shall stay. Look you, Trewartha, I begin to feel what it is to have kin of one's own. I like this young fellow for something that I do not believe ever was in Anah McRae or John Hurst. But he is out of place."

"And you propose to right him?" twirling a pungent cedar-wood paper-knife between his fingers.

"His mother has been weak—weak;" with sharp emphasis. "If she chose to give up the refinements and ambitions of life when John Hurst felt called to preach to the outcast and poor, she had no right to make her son's way so bald. I would have fought for him;" shutting her white strong teeth with a forcible click. "He has something on his mind, some dream or wish that he hardly dares to confess. He shall stay here and work it out."

"In the quarry?" with a provoking laugh, stroking his moustache.

"Let him begin there, since it is his choice," with a resolute nod of the head.

"And you think—these two young people—"

He paused abruptly, glancing at a bright spot in the carpet.

"I should like to have them marry!" in her clear, ringing tone. "Ruth has been as a daughter to me, though I would force no one's inclination."

"Only bias it;" in a dry, humorous manner that went no farther than the surface.

"I could dower her without impoverishing him. Why, the mill down yonder and the village would be a fortune for any girl to bring her husband, and Cragness would hardly miss it. But I would rather have them marry. I have been studying both. He has just the force and daring to stimulate her; she, the repose, grace, and quiet that such a man needs. What one lacks the other will supply, and make an harmonious, well-balanced couple."

"And love—?"

You could hardly tell whether it were disbelief or a fine irony in his smooth tone.

"I think 'blind contact' as much as anything. She has the kind of reserved strength very attractive to such vehement natures, who blaze up and fancy themselves soon burned out to ashes. I shall manage the matter judiciously,—give him just enough and not too much of her. And now, Doctor Trewartha, will you help me keep him here?"

"Yes, I will do that;" with a little mental reservation as to the other point.

"You see he did not fancy Sylvia at all, nor she him, though I was a trifle afraid in the beginning. She is such a child."

"What is to be done first?" abruptly.

"If you would drive over to Taunton and have an interview with this Hensler—taking Victor with you—" She hated mortally to give it up herself, as business was her delight. "The quarry could be opened immediately. They saw the stone last summer."

"There is a good deal of money in it."

"Too much to put into his hands?"

"I don't know what you would call just enough;" rather doubtfully.

"I want him to feel quite independent, to be able to provide for his parents, and indulge in some whims if he chooses. I should like to see the bent of his mind. Perhaps—"

reflectively, "I was over hasty. He may have some fault or vice that we know nothing of, and if so, it would come out when he found himself no longer watched."

"Suppose you let him manage the quarry for half the profits? They expect to be two years building the church, and school or college. I don't know just what they do mean to make of it —a nunnery, I dare say," with a laugh.

"I should be loth to have my stone go into a nunnery," with a gleam of latent Scotch Presbyterianism in her eye.

"Pooh! and you a progressionist! Let our neighbors do as they like, so long as they keep from interfering with our rights and privileges."

"You think half would be sufficient?" going back to the business. "And John Hurst may live—"

"Seven years or seven months. At present I incline to the first."

"I shall be sure of *him* long before that;" nodding her head decisively.

"You will have him married and his children playing about your knees," he said, in a tone that was soft, yet exceedingly bitter.

She did not remark it, being preoccupied with the distant vision, and a smile crossed her grim face.

"Will you return with me?"

"No. Don't let us look too much like a conspiracy. I think, on the whole, we had better drive to Taunton to-morrow morning. Do you suppose the Hursts will go away?"

"By themselves?" That startled her. "Well, why not if they want to? There is Denzil's cottage standing empty. Perhaps it would be better, for I do not want him to tire of Ruth. I shall not be the first to propose it, however."

"I will be over to-morrow."

"Not this evening?"

"Well, yes, this evening."

He came before that time, however. Victor, restless and ill

at ease, took an afternoon tramp over to the Cedars, and brought Trewartha back to tea. Mrs. McRae was in fine spirits, and her sweet-humored mood reacted upon the household. She and Doctor Trewartha had a spicy argument or two, over which Victor smiled oddly.

Trewartha's wide eyes, that seemed to have the gift of seeing on all sides, wandered furtively to Ruth Garnier. A sound, healthy-toned woman, with none of the modern sickly nonsense about her, was Janet McRae's boast. Pure, firm flesh, sound, steady nerves, no sitting up at night to study misty transcendentalism, no reading of trashy novels. Books there were in plenty; stories too, well chosen; but it must be confessed that Ruth was no great reader. Sylvia perched herself on a window-ledge and galloped through everything, from Froissart down to Idyls of the King, while Ruth was in the kitchen compounding a choice cake.

If to be a thorough woman meant a purely domestic animal, Janet McRae had done her work very well. A cook like Ruth Garnier it would have been hard to find. True, she did not spend much of her time in the kitchen now, but on rare occasions she made her influence felt there.

"Every woman should know enough to order her own house," Mrs. McRae used to repeat, as one of the strongest articles of her creed. "Can you show a servant how to broil a steak, when you do not know how to do it yourself?"

So Ruth had potatoes and plum-pudding, instead of useless philosophy. And there was needle-work, the unfailing panacea for all feminine ills and discomforts. She possessed a great fancy for it. Embroidery was perhaps her strongest passion, the same as painting to many a girl. Why, the moss-buds in the work she had finished a little while back were like a touch of nature. You could almost pick them out of their green and sienna-tinted beds.

There was a good deal beside this. Long walks, that brought the pink to her creamy cheeks, and brightened her eyes; rides

over hill and dale, with the fresh wind in her face, and pleasant drives rendered the more delightful by Sylvia's society. Calls, visits, small parties, such as christenings, birthdays, or weddings; errands of mercy to the sick, and church-going. Not that she mapped out her time in regular order, but somehow it seemed to run in just such grooves.

So Ruth Garnier, the penniless, well-nigh friendless orphan, had been as much of a success as the mill, the comfortable dwellings, and remunerative work, the clean and orderly village. No wonder, then, Janet McRae was so ready to undertake Victor Hurst. She often fancied that she managed Frank Trewartha.

He sat watching the two now—Victor studying a book of engravings, and she with that everlasting work in her white fingers, which annoyed him. It was tatting now, with a dainty pearl shuttle—he had brought it to her from Philadelphia, and now his own gift vexed him.

A handsome couple they would be, with just about the right difference in age. So far as physical attributes went—well and good. The silken, soft, bronze hair, with its hue of sun and inward heats, contrasted well with those dark, heavy braids. The fine, subtle complexion; the changeful, large-lidded eyes, that made you think of flowers in bloom when he raised them softly, set against those untroubled wells of brown; the waxen skin, that had more of the calla in its composition than the mimosa For she so rarely blushed, or betrayed any embarrassment.

Something vexed Trewartha then. The argument which had trilled smoothly over pebbles came to a snag, and his rich, mellow voice grew a trifle sharp. Ruth glanced slowly toward the fire, as if her eyes were groping their way about, and encountered him.

"I wouldn't give you that," snapping his fingers, angrily, "for a nature that you can measure; and weigh, and define accurately. There always must be something left for circumstances to develop, unless one is—an idiot."

"And I say that, with the proper training, you *can* predict the

man or the woman from the child. Half of your temperament theory is a farce. When a man commits a sin, call it a sin and punish it, as you would in a child. It is the maudling sensibility miscalled tenderness that makes half the trouble in the world. Some trick of temperament, some latent force acted upon by this peculiar conjunction of circumstances, made the man act as he did. Faugh! He was a free agent to do what he liked, and he chose crime. It is training that is responsible."

"And when you have moulded your subjects' nature to that state of perfection—?" with a brilliant satirical, smile.

"You can count to a certainty upon what they will do. If you sow tares, you would not expect to reap wheat, and if—"

"But some tares generally find their way among the wheat, I have observed—" dryly, pushing back his chair.

Then his eyes met Ruth's. Instead of their usual placid expression, there was a forlorn, questioning terror in them.

"Put up your work," he said, in his abrupt imperious fashion. "Get the chess-board, and let us have a game before I go. Madame McRae, there is no use in arguing with you. A ring is round—that is all. You will never come to an end."

Ruth played badly. For the first time he fancied the white fingers trembled. Would that young upstart, deep in the dainty line and stipple of an engraving, ever kiss any color in them?

"There, you are beaten, Miss Garnier, and it makes me cross as a bear to win arguments, games, and all. Adversity is ever a sweetener of disposition. Now for Black Dick, and a gallop in this keen night air to restore my good temper."

Mrs. McRae was explaining Ben Lomond, and nodded her good-night with a threatening shake of her long forefinger. Ruth went out to the hall.

"How odd the place seems without Silvia! She was quite home-sick when I bade her good-by."

A flush overspread the calm face—so unusual a circumstance that Trewartha started. The thick lids drooped, their long jetty lashes making a shadow sweep over the cheek.

"You will see her to-morrow?" in a strangely eager tone.

"I don't know. Did you wish to send a message?"

"I—? No—that is—"

He faced Ruth for a moment, took her hand, and compelled her to look up, by his own strong personal magnetism. The fingers fairly trembled in his clasp.

"Good-night."

She heard Black Dick utter his fiery snort as his feet roused clattering echoes from the frozen ground. But there was no change in her face as she took up her neglected tatting.

Only low in her heart there swept a sudden flood-tide of mysterious life which threatened to break down the barriers that had hitherto confined her soul—a half-spiritual, half-physical power of resistance to a vague something that she could not understand, and with it all a sense of powerlessness.

"She is jealous of Sylvia," mused Trewartha. "Sylvia, whom she loved like a kitten a month ago. And why? Sylvia and Hurst were rather briery, I thought. What a plan that of Madame Janet's! Ice and snow! Yet if *she* falls into it readily!"

He began to whistle a gay French chanson heard in a *salon* years ago, where soft voices and bright faces made a beguiling atmosphere. He was young in those days and had some hot blood in his veins.

He lingered awhile over the lilies that night.

"I used to think them like her. Well, they have a rare golden centre, a heart,—but how about the soul of both?"

Victor and Trewartha set out for Taunton the next morning. Mrs. McRae, having her in-door business arranged to her satisfaction, went down to the mill; while Ruth, being lady of the house, was courteous and attentive to Mrs. Hurst, and ordered the dinner.

It was dusk of the crisp March day when the travellers returned. Miss Garnier was not called from her work this

evening. Instead of the red and white chess-men there were slips of paper full of figures, estimates, much adding and discussion.

"It is a solid bed of rock for miles and miles," said Mrs. McRae. "An excellent quality of stone, too; and the carting a mere nothing."

"Cragness is famous for luck. There was an old copper-mine once somewhere about, and I dare say we shall discover gold at last."

"Gold is a poor thing for the land in which it is found;" with a disdainful jerk of her grand head. "We have developed industry, which is far better. The absence of any well-regulated system of labor affords loop-holes for every evil under the sun to creep in and flourish. An indolent community will be a miserable one."

Victor smiled inwardly. He was growing too wise to rush out to battle for any small theory; and he felt that Mrs. McRae was admirable in many ways. A little narrow, he sometimes fancied, and often dogmatic; but her labors had certainly borne good fruit.

"So, I shall turn the quarry over into your hands, young sir, making only one stipulation. There shall be no drunkenness, that curse of the cities."

"But Hurst's workmen must of necessity be different from yours," explained Trewartha. "They will be rough men from the town, with no families and no flower-gardens to occupy their leisure moments."

"There's not a pint of liquor to be bought in the village," she returned, testily. "If they bring their rum with them and drink it out of hours, I hardly know how it can be prevented; but he shall make this rule—the first man he finds under the influence of liquor shall be discharged. Tell them that in the beginning."

"I will," he said, heartily, remembering how his father had fought against the demon of intemperance.

Janet McRae looked up at Doctor Trewartha in the most beatific triumph.

"You are rabid Father Matthew crusaders," he said, with a short laugh. "I wish you would come over to the Cedars and take a bottle of wine with me. I have some choice, I assure you."

"I have undertaken no crusade against you strong-brained people, who have plenty of money to spend, purchase the best always, and can afford to sleep all the morning when you have held an orgie over-night. It is for the poor wretches who starve their wives and children that they may buy vile, poisonous stuff that transforms them into something worse than brute beasts. If I cannot have the Cragness community sober, I'll close the workshops and nail up the cottage-doors."

It was her hobby to map out the duties and privileges of those who were in any manner subordinate, and Doctor Trewartha confessed inwardly that the plan had not worked ill. There were a great many people in the world incapable of leading even themselves.

In the course of a few days the matter was arranged satisfactorily. Victor felt quite elated.

"I am glad we came," he said to his mother. "There will be an opportunity to make something above our bare living. Mrs. McRae was very generous; for after I had accepted it for half the profit, she was afraid that would not be enough; but I am not willing to subject myself to any obligation that may gall me by-and-by. I want to remain quite unfettered."

"Yes;" with a little sigh. If it *had* been different.

"We are to take the cottage. I thought you would like better to have a home of your own again. It is a pretty, quiet little place; and here there will be guests coming and going continually."

"It is much better."

She spoke the simple truth. Indeed, there had been times when she felt almost stifled with the luxury for which she

could make no return ; and the sense of supervision that clung about her like a shadow.

As for Victor, he threw himself, heart and soul, into the new life. He was not likely to stint ambition or energy in an interest which promised as much as this.

He found in Doctor Trewartha a staunch and peculiar friend. His experience in this respect had been rather limited ; and the secret in the depths of his soul disposed him to the cautiousness one hardly expects of youth. But this man was wonderfully fascinating, with his rich, varying moods, his vigor, when he chose to call it to the surface, his brilliancy ; and the half-cynical, half-tender vein perplexed and pleased, lured onward, and yet never satisfied.

By the middle of May they were settled in their new home. Ruth had supervised it with her housewifely instincts. Mrs. Hurst had drawn quite near to the girl during the past month. There was a restful quality in her grave nature, very grateful indeed to the woman who had been so long tried with sharp, irritable nerves and restless brains, and haunted by a tragic under-current. For Ruth had a broad, calm surface, like a fair lake, with no hint of storms. It is true that many of these women go through life without ever having been roused to one magnificent emotion.

She took a warm interest in the Hursts, partly, perhaps, because she had been bidden so to do ; but there was something in the sad matron's gentleness, the hopeless invalidism of the husband, and the energy of the son, that attracted her more strongly than anything hitherto in her uneventful life : quite a new element at Cragness. Somehow she began to feel the burden of the swathing-bands wrapped around her by kind hands of friendship, and there were moments when she longed to tear them off—if she but knew where to begin. A new soul was moving upon the face of the waters, troubling it.

CHAPTER XX.

They were so much engrossed at Cragness, Sylvia Redmond thought, that she was fast dropping out of sight or mind. She had too much vanity to take neglect complacently; and then the days at cousin Braisted's were monotonous. Even Doctor Trewartha was busy, and Black Dick used to traverse the road with his long, sweeping gallop, just giving his master time to touch his hat to her as he passed.

And then Victor Hurst was winning golden opinions, becoming quite a hero. Even Ruth was moved from her self-poise, and admired with an interest quite new to her. The quarry was in successful operation, and a possible fortune hidden in its gray depths.

This lovely golden June afternoon Sylvia had managed to get away by herself. She came down stairs in her pretty riding costume and her dainty chip hat, with its long white plume, sent a week before with a box full of elegant attire, part of her mother's purchases in New York.

"I am going to Cragness," she announced to invalid Rebecca, who sat placidly knitting.

Rebecca had a message for friend Janet. Sylvia listened, flicking her pearl-handle whip. Somehow she was not in her usual delightful humor.

Indeed, she felt cross. Her mother's letter fretted her. She had been sorry to come to this dull little place; but it was that or school, which she disliked still more. For the frivolous fashionable woman, a faded beauty, yet a favorite with society, had no mind to be troubled with a pretty, wilful girl, until she saw some advantages for her. She wanted her glories and her ease quite to herself.

But now, when she was not of the slightest account to any one, she told herself that she did not want to go. Every tree suddenly took on a peculiar nearness. Yet there was the sentence. In about ten days Mrs. Redmond expected to come for her, and promised her a gay summer. Among other gossip, she wrote—"Eustace Gilliat returned in March."

Six months ago it would have proved unfeigned pleasure. She was no more used to analyzing or reasoning than Ruth Garnier, though her internal processes were so much more rapid. But of late it seemed as if she had not been happy, and was every day drifting farther and farther away.

Madame McRae and Ruth were out. So then Sylvia felt quite at liberty to ramble about at her own sweet will; and she turned her pony's head villageward. She would doubtless meet them there.

She found herself, after a brisk canter, in the vicinity of the quarry; and though the intervening trees hid the excavation, she heard the steady, monotonous drilling. Obeying the first impulse that swayed her, she bent her course toward the mountain-side, and wandered slowly round the little ledge, until startled by a sight that brought the quick blood to her cheeks.

Just at her feet, it seemed, was a curious, half-hidden nook, embowered by a thicket of dwarfed pines, and carpeted by rank mosses. A large flat stone was spread out like a desk or table, and before it sat Victor Hurst, his hair thrown back from his wide white brow, and his eyes intent upon something before him—a drawing done in crayon, and a block of the gray quarry-stone, at which he was hammering with mallet and chisel.

Her quick brain took it in at once, and her heart gave an exultant bound. The pony's feet crackled the dry branches, breaking the student's solitude, and he glanced up. She nodded, with her gay little laugh, elfin and mischievous.

He scrambled the few articles hurriedly together, and with

two or three swinging bounds reached the level where she stood, flushed, and somewhat confused, saying "Miss Redmond," in his first breath, and then lapsing into an almost ungracious silence.

He had vexed, tormented, and puzzled her; and with a girl's coquettish instincts, she determined to be even with him.

"Well, are you not going to invite me to your studio, or can no one enter who does not climb up and down like a deer?"

"My studio, Miss Redmond?"

"I was not aware that we had an artist among us," she went on, with her tormenting coolness, when she saw how it annoyed him.

He flushed and frowned, biting his firm lips to keep down the sudden passion.

"You are mistaken, I believe. A man may indulge in some whims, and yet never dream of—position."

"You will have that. You can afford to indulge in whims."

"I shall have—the result of my labor, whatever that may be."

His steady manner of ignoring all advantages fretted her. Why should he continually abase himself?

"You will have Cragness," in a clear, sharp tone, glancing keenly at him.

He stood unmoved, the color in his face not even wavering.

"You have given your opinion prematurely. I have—other plans—and but small right. Miss Garnier is better entitled to it."

"Mrs. McRae carries her intentions plainly, and you are the last of the family."

"She knows my plans, however."

Sylvia Redmond paused in her wordy war. Why did they always happen to jar when they met? Then she said in a softer tone, "I am going away."

"Going?"

He checked himself abruptly. What was it to him whether she went or stayed? Why could not all these people let him work in his own fashion, and not burrow into the secret he was trying to keep out of sight.

As they stood there facing one another, there was a sharp, ringing report; a sullen echo among the trees, and a splinter of the rock came crashing through the foliage at their very feet. Miss Redmond's pony gave an alarmed snort, reared, and in another instant would have plunged over theledge; but a firm hand caught the bridle.

"Thank you." There was a little tremble in her voice. "I might have gone down there uninvited, after all," smiling faintly. "I suppose I was rude to you; but I did not mean to be. Don't remember all these naughty things against me when I am gone."

Her voice was very sweet. When she was gone! Far apart as they had been for three months, these months when they had seen each other every few days, still he had fallen into the habit of watching her as one does a rare beautiful picture. Her absence *would* make a blank. The old unreasoning heat and anger vanished.

"I shall not be likely to remember what you would wish me to forget;" in a grave, courteous tone, thinking of the past, as she too thought of it at that moment.

A sound of high words caught his ear. "If you will excuse me a moment," he said, and bounding over the gray ledges, he took a short cut to the quarry. Fifteen or twenty men were examining the fissure made in the side of the rock.

"Who lighted that?" he asked, as the voices subsided.

"I did," was the dogged answer of a short, square-built man nearest him.

"I told you on Monday, Jarvis, that I was to be here;" in an authoritative tone.

"But you weren't. I set 'em off last summer;" rather sullenly.

"That was my order. A shout or a whistle would have summoned me. I was waiting for you to get ready."

"Well, it's all done," returned Jarvis, crossly. "I blasted rocks while you were a youngster. I guess I know my own business."

"And I mine," in a clear, ringing tone.

The men began to gather their tools from safe distance and survey the fragments strewn around. Jarvis made no further answer, but sitting down, carelessly chipped at a block.

"Them chaps think they know so much," Jarvis flung out, angrily, when the last footsteps had died away. "Because he's kin of that cranky old woman, he carries himself like a lord. I'd like to teach him a lesson or two."

Jarvis had been one of the last summer's hands, and clothed with a little authority. At that time there had been no regular rule, and the roughest of the men secretly objected to the new order of things, going so far in one instance as to threaten defection.

"Very well," Victor Hurst had said. In his heart he hoped Jarvis would keep his word. He had learned considerable about managing men, young as he was. Unfortunately, youth was the crime in their eyes.

He strode back to Sylvia, in a less amiable mood.

"They were blasting," she said. "Did any accident happen."

"No." Then, as it was rather awkward standing there, he asked if she would like to see what they had done.

She turned her horse and led him slowly down the narrow path to the road, where they soon came to the débris. She looked at the rent, perforated here and there by the slender holes drilled for the fuse, the masses of rock, the great, cavernous entrance. It was like hewing away a mountain.

While the talk flowed on pleasantly, he was thinking of the secret she held. A laughing word to Trewartha, a careless one to Mrs. McRae, would bring his hidden plans to light. If

he failed here as he had in the painting—and a flush of mortification overspread his brow—better that these friends should know nothing of it. But how to insure her silence?

They came back presently. When she saw the path he was taking, she stopped.

"You need not go;" with a little gasp. "I am ashamed of my impertinence, and I have no foolish curiosity. Your plans are your own, as you have said. I think you capable of working them through, whatever they may be."

Her clear, serious words were so different from Miss Lowndes' extravagant praise, that it gave him courage.

Perhaps she was a little disappointed when he turned. There really was no use in betraying that crude work, he thought. The time to surprise her had not come.

"Well," he said, "I am obliged for your faith in me, though I may never do anything to deserve it."

"I believe you will. But why not—take the help that is proffered?"

"Because I had rather work my way. Will you stop at the cottage?" he asked, suddenly changing his tone. "My mother was wondering yesterday why you did not come. And if you are going away—I am at liberty now to escort you;" smiling.

The shimmering radiance of the late sun fluttered in great hazy waves over the swaying meadows and fields of grain. The still air was fragrant with summer smells—distant honeysuckle, and wild grape, and the spice of growing woodlands. But she was in no mood to note the beauty or mysterious tenderness of nature.

She was going away. There would be a fair field for Ruth Garnier, backed by these broad lands, and Mrs. McRae's influence. Of course it would be so. She could see the end from the beginning, and they had all made it plain enough. To be sure, he was proud; but then—the current would prove too strong, and in the end he would yield. She strangled a little

sigh in her throat with a bitter, bitter pang. For she seemed to be drifting into utter loneliness.

Ruth Garnier sat on the porch in her flowing white robes, with a deep red rose at her throat, making the white neck whiter. Mr. Hurst's chair had been wheeled out of doors, and she was beside it, talking in her calm, pleasant fashion. So they had given her a daughter's place already.

Mrs. Hurst came out to welcome Sylvia. The lips she kissed were cold, for all their summer redness. Ruth nodded cordially, but remained to finish her sentence. The girl's quick eyes took in Mr. Hurst's fatherly smile, and a pang tore her soul.

"You are such a rare visitor," Mrs. Hurst was saying. "The night will be fine, so you can hardly refuse to take a social cup of tea with us. And Ruth being here, too—"

With that she glanced at Victor.

"I will see that she reaches her cousin's in safety," he made answer, bowing.

No one cared very much about her staying. They were all happy enough without her. How miserably lonely she was in this wide, dreary world.

"I am not quite in visiting costume," with a short, unmusical laugh, that caused Victor to turn and study her for a moment.

"Oh, that will make no difference. You are always a little picture in anything," and Mrs. Hurst's sweet, cordial smile went to her heart.

He went round to the other side, pretending to examine a buckle. "Are you still offended with me?" he asked.

"Miss Garnier, come and persuade Sylvia," said Mrs. Hurst, taking a step farther away, and Sylvia seeing the advantage, bent her head to reply.

"Why should I be?"

"I don't know. If the confidence is worth giving, if it was anything beyond a crude idea—and yet—you have my secret."

She did not know how to translate the hesitation, the voice that seemed to waver between friendliness and stern self-control.

"Since I surprised it, Mr. Hurst, it can hardly be called a pleasant or honorable knowledge. It will be like the things that are not, to me."

After all, she really did not care. It was but a girlish triumph. And yet, studying the child's face, he found a deeper meaning in it, a strange sympathetic soul, if one might be sure of the right key.

Ruth came and kissed her, and the two voices were joined in pleading. She was frightened at herself, when she found she was actually drifting into a dull dislike of her friend whom she had loved only a brief while ago. And then Trewartha's strong, stirring voice broke up the reign of womanly softness

Mrs. McRae determined that her stubborn heir-elect should not lose caste with high or low if she could prevent it. The cottage had been furnished to her own fancy, and she had parted with one of her best servants—bribed her to go indeed. But the Hursts lived in their own quiet fashion for all that.

They made Sylvia dismount and remain to supper. Trewartha having Black Dick, was Sylvia's escort afterward ; but he found the poor child strangely dull. He could not rouse her into sharp, petulant answers. Victor drove Ruth home in the carriage which Mrs. McRae had insisted should be at Mr. Hurst's disposal whenever he was able to be taken out. She smiled benignantly at the success of these small schemes that she fancied no one read.

The days flew rapidly to Sylvia Redmond. For the following week she had no opportunity to steal even one solitary ramble ; and then her mother came down in state, making quite a stir in the simple Quaker home.

A faded beauty, as I said, irritable in temper, and with the nerves that are some women's continual boast. You could always tell her by her fan, and handkerchiefs, and scent-bottles, with which she filled every table or stand within her reach. Sylvia

thought her a good deal changed. There was a restless light in her pale eyes, a flutter of apprehension about her, as if she were on the continual look-out for some impending danger. Or was it because *she* had become so used to these healthy-toned people, who were a mental tonic in themselves?

"Our plans have been altered somewhat," she announced to Sylvia, depositing herself carefully upon her daughter's bed in lieu of a sofa, and fanning languidly. "Mrs. Gilliat is much worse. The Doctor has ordered perfect quiet and mountain air. They have come to try St. Albans."

"St. Albans! Why it is only—" and Sylvia's heart beat guiltily with a thrill of pleasure.

"A resort for invalids. I know that well enough;" in a querulous tone. "I need something more exciting, but it was my dear friend, and I consented. Eustace is with his mother;" eyeing her daughter sharply.

But Sylvia was thinking of the distance only, or rather the nearness. Why, she could almost see the little nest in the range of mountains yonder. Years ago some one had built a great roomy hotel, thinking to make it a famous resort for health-seekers; but it had rather languished and become a rendezvous for tourists, travelling artists, and the like. There was a spring of remarkable mineral water, and the pure bracing air was enough of itself to restore the most hopeless invalid. And then she would not be altogether deprived of her old friends. Doctor Trewartha and Ruth would surely come.

"I promised to bring you back with me this week. Get out your clothes, Sylvia, and see if you have anything to wear. I suppose there is no one here who could even tie a sash fit to be seen. We shall have to depend upon Stella."

Sylvia obeyed dutifully. "I am sure there is enough to last me seven years, mamma," she said.

"Seven years!" pettishly. "Little you know about it, child." I have some beautiful lawns and grenadines yet uncut, but I don't know what I'm to do if Stella sews all the time.

Those white dresses look beautifully. What a laundress cousin Rachel must have. And after all I believe young girls look as well in white as in anything else. Sylvia, hand me that bottle on the dressing-table. My poor head! It aches fearfully."

Sylvia poured a little of the perfumed water on a handkerchief, and would have bathed her mother's face, but that lady's complexion was too sacred a thing to be tampered with.

"Don't be so officious, child! I certainly do not care to be deluged. You have no regard whatever for my nerves. When you have gone through with as much as I have, you will learn to be more delicate, I hope. If I had known when I was at your age that a woman's whole life depends upon the kind of marriage she makes—"

Sylvia colored a trifle at the scrutiny.

"Yes, marriage is a matter of great importance. Eustace asked me if I had kept his little wife safe for him, Sylvia."

"Mamma, that was nonsense, childish nonsense," and a scarlet heat flushed the young girl's face.

"Nonsense for a man to remember? You are very ungrateful, Sylvia;" and the mother sighed.

She made no reply. There had been a time when Eustace Gilliat was a sort of hero to her, though it was more the family prestige and her admiration for his father than any real fancy for the boy.

"Has there been any society here this winter?" Mrs. Redmond asked, sharply.

"I thought it quite dull at first; then I found Doctor Trewartha entertaining."

"He is old enough to be your father."

Mrs. Redmond silently studied her daughter. A fair, sweet girl, with beauty enough for almost any man's fancy. She had resolved to have her marry well; if possible, to become Mrs. Gilliat. She had a longing to queen it in that old house herself, in a position different from that of a guest. She

had skilfully fanned Eustace's weak liking into quite a desire. There were no rivals at St. Albans, and if he would only stay. But she must lose no time in presenting Sylvia, for already the child began to have some opinions of her own.

With the aid of Stella, her maid, Mrs. Redmond summoned sufficient energy to get her daughter ready in the course of the next two days. Doctor Trewartha made a friendly call, but his manner was most fatherly and unexceptionable. Mrs. McRae and Ruth paid their respects to Sylvia's mother, also.

"That terrible woman!" and Mrs. Redmond fanned as if to clear the air. "So loud-voiced and man-like, and in such absolutely coarse health. A person of her age, too; but it is in the blood, I suppose, in the blood."

Sylvia started. Somehow it seemed as if the whole current of her life and belief had changed. How had she learned to look deeper than the surface; to send down quick, earnest glances that challenged the souls she met; to discern the weak, false, and meretricious, from the brave and true? A man or woman who worked out life in noble actions, like Mrs. McRae, or any other brave, fearless soul, was nobler, after all, than any puny being, backed by a long line of ancestry. Had a taint of radicalism crept into her brain?

"Poor child, poor Sylvia," exclaimed Mrs. McRae, "she has outgrown her foolish mother, and that is a hard thing when one would fain reverence. I felt like taking her in my arms and bringing her to Cragness for all time. But I suppose her happy childhood will come to an end shortly. Thank God that I have no daughters to sacrifice to Dagon."

If Sylvia had indulged in a frantic hope of a reprieve at the last moment, she was doomed to disappointment. The day was cloudless, the dresses in order, the carriage not a moment behindhand.

They passed down the road by the quarry. Victor Hurst and Trewartha stood talking, and both bowed.

"Who is that young man, Sylvia?" her mother asked.

"A connection of Mrs. McRae's. He has taken charge of the quarry, and—"

"That is enough," decisively. "That woman's blood would taint anything for me."

A chill crept over Sylvia as she relapsed into silence.

She had no keener eyes to-day for the beautiful road than her mother. Winding around the lofty hills bathed in purple splendor, passing narrow defiles where the wind swept through with the sad undertone of the sea, masses of rock tumbled together in great crags, veined with what seemed both silver and gold, and now and then a glimpse of the river, blue in its shaded depths as the sky above. But she did not see these grand shifting pictures; and all she could think of was some poor wretch going to a dreaded fate: something which turned her cold and sick.

It was almost dusk when they entered St. Albans, a tiny, quaint old town, perched on a level plateau between two mountains, while a host of smaller hills seemed to lie sleeping at its feet. For the last hour Mrs. Redmond had been exceedingly irritable; and Sylvia was glad to hear a pleasant voice.

"So you have brought her back—our little Sylvia;" and she felt her hand taken in a gracious clasp.

"Oh, Mr. Gilliat!"

"We are glad to see you again, my child, very glad;" and yet it appeared to Sylvia there was a touch of pain and weariness in the tone that she had never discerned there before.

For all her complaints and fatigue, Mrs. Redmond underwent a somewhat elaborate dressing at the hands of her tirewoman. Mrs. Gilliat's prestige had gathered a number of notabilities at St. Albans, and this weak, foolish creature wished to shine among them—it would always be the ambition of her vapid, narrow life. And now was added to it the zest of marrying her daughter.

Eustace Gilliat was lounging in the spacious parlor as they entered. To Sylvia he looked weaker and more effeminate

than ever before, and something else that she discerned but could not reduce to words. The faded eyes were vicious, the mouth cruel and sensual, the drawling tone seemed to rasp every nerve. And when she contrasted him with such men as Trewartha and Victor Hurst, a shiver of disgust ran over her.

Not a son to be proud of, was Eustace Gilliat. He appeared to have set at defiance all the laws and salient peculiarities of his long line of ancestry. The strength, manliness, and beauty which had been a distinctive feature in them for generations, failed to catch the subtile trick here. Perhaps the blood was effete, worn out, or in some mysterious manner the father had failed to give the son his own physical vitality, as well as mental power. Or going still farther back, there might be some hidden but avenging curse.

He had been recently expelled from a German university; and his father had paid his gambling debts, that were a serious matter even to the Gilliat income. It could not be said that fate had exactly prospered him. True, he had held positions of trust and honor, his wife had won admiration abroad and at home; but now she was suffering from a hopeless and incurable disease, and his son disappointed him at every turn. He had grown sensitive to a point of irritability; and though he strove to be the light-hearted, gracious gentleman of past days, in his soul he knew every step was a wretched failure.

CHAPTER XXI.

"In one light the case is hopeless. It is organic disease of long standing. You asked me for the truth, Mr. Gilliat, and under such circumstances, I always give a man or a woman a truthful answer."

"But she is so much improved. Your skill has worked wonders. I wish we had known you before, Doctor Trewartha."

Trewartha gave a short, rather incredulous laugh.

"If we doctors could do everything, the laws that govern the universe would be set aside. And if we could rule our patients' habits, thoughts, emotions, and temper, we might add fifty years to their lives; perhaps a hundred, who knows?" The genial ring Sylvia loved so well coming back to his voice. "The air and quiet are wonderfully in Mrs. Gilliat's favor. I should think she had been deeply worried and perplexed before—the last attack; and she was just in a situation to rally when I came, so I will not take undue credit. She may live years, but she must keep her mind tranquil, use no violent physical exertion, and above all things, not to be thwarted or opposed. The person who rouses her to any strong excitement would be guilty of her murder."

Doctor Trewartha uttered the last sentence strongly and clearly.

"We shall all take the best of care of her," in a tremulous voice.

"She needs that, and cheerful companionship. Many people now-a-days hold their lives in their hands; it has become something more serious than a figure of speech. But by observing these rules, it is possible for her to live years longer."

Sylvia Redmond was pacing the long balcony outside, and the sound came through the open windows, though the voices were not raised. One sentence rang in her ears like the sound of a booming gun at sea when a ship is in danger. So she waited for the agile step, and strong, heartsome figure, whose very words were fraught with life and death, and filled her with a strange awe.

"Ha, Midge!" and he put out his hand; surveying her with critical eyes.

"Is it true what you said—about Mrs. Gilliat—that a person who roused her would be guilty of her murder?"

Her lips were white and tremulous.

"True as—death itself, which never fails us, but is sure to come sooner or later. But there is nothing in it that need concern you, child. I gave the advice for others. She has been a magnificent woman, and her day has hardly declined. It vexes me to see men and women living out only half of their appointed time."

Sylvia was silent. If she dared to tell him how this concerned her, to ask him what she must do with all this weight of misery crushing her to the earth.

"How you have changed, Midge. I can hardly realize that this is the wild, petulant little girl of three months ago. Why, you are a stylish, fashionable woman."

He guessed it from the hard lines he mis-read in her face, from the almost haughty carriage of the head and the certain aplomb society gives to those who are easily trained. Her tight-fitting mauve silk made her look older, and the set, firm expression heightened the peculiar grace surrounding her.

"Yes, I am a fashionable woman. I seem to have left girlhood a long way behind."

"More's the pity, Midge; but young things like you never know how sacred it is."

He was watching her with a half pity, very hard to take from him.

"We come to other knowledge so soon. They are all well at Cragness?"

"Miserably healthy," with a laugh. "It is worth nearing seventy to be such a woman as Mrs. McRae."

"A pattern to which I cannot hope to attain," sharply. "There is none of it in our blood, I think."

He saw the vision of her fretful, faded mother—the rich blood converted into prickly, restless nerves; yet when she was young she might have been another blooming Sylvia.

"I wish I could take you over to Cragness," he said, dissatisfied with the haunting look in her eyes.

"But you cannot. I have new duties. All my life has changed, I think."

Mrs. Redmond came down the balcony with her languishing air, fan and scent-bottle in hand.

"My darling Sylvia, Mrs. Gilliat has been asking for you. If Doctor Trewartha will excuse you. How wonderfully our dear invalid has improved, Doctor."

Sylvia Redmond turned without glancing up. He fancied he knew women so well that he hardly thought this one was going to any doom, while in her soul she heard the crunch of the keel on the ragged black rocks, but uttered no cry. Was it worth while to struggle? Was not life itself a mocking, blind mischance—a sea on which the poor puppets were hurried hither and thither?

Mrs. Gilliat, in an elegant morning robe, sat on the sofa, a few books, papers, and a handful of flowers scattered on the one side, while at the other a vacant space, to which she motioned Sylvia, studying her intently. The child certainly had grace and beauty, and a bright, cheerful disposition, unlike her mother's, yet not strong. A tender, sweet, pliable nature. She had always liked her, though in the old days Eustace's term of "little wife" had not been altogether sweet to her ears. But whatever ambitious dreams she might have had for her son were at an end now.

"Sit down, my dear;" in the caressing tone rarely used by her, but which was full of subtile fascination. "I am so much better this morning that I thought I might indulge in a long talk with you. Let me pin this cluster of heliotrope on your bosom. There, I like its pungent odor so much, and its dark beauty. You are a little too pale, Sylvia."

"I went to walk—" flushing a trifle.

"That is better. Sylvia, during the past fortnight I have envied your mother. I wish I had a daughter."

Her arm stole softly around Sylvia's waist, while the young girl tried hard to steady every shrinking nerve.

"And I think I might have. Sylvia, your mother can spare you better than I. Eustace has confessed to me his wishes—"

"Oh, Mrs. Gilliat!" with a little cry, burying her face on the other's bosom.

"My darling, I am so glad. I told Eustace it was only a girl's natural shyness. Sylvia, you have his whole life in your hands. He has been a little wild and extravagant, but it is like young men. You can charm him with your winsome graces, and wean him from careless habits. To me you will be very dear."

Sylvia Redmond gave a great gasp.

"Oh, Mrs. Gilliat, hear me! I do not love Eustace as a wife should. I am afraid—"

"That is quite natural, child. The old playful friendship has been outgrown, and this new regard taking its place is a little strange. But Eustace is very much in earnest. I tremble to have him disappointed. Think, Sylvia, a word might send him back into the old reckless courses. He is so much to me, so much. I would do anything to save him. It seems now as if it was all in your hands."

She began to tremble violently. She had but spoken the truth when she said her son was dear to her. With all his faults and vices, and the fatal deficiencies in his nature, he was the one thing she had bequeathed to Rothermel, all that would

be left of her when she lay in the grave. If he and his children could reign there when Kirke Gilliat had forgotten her!

The words rang in Sylvia's ears like the stern sentence of a judge—"guilty of murder!" Her tortured self-consciousness exaggerated the power she might exert, and like some poor goaded animal she turned hither and thither for an avenue of escape, finding them all closed.

"Only give me time," she cried.

"Yes, dear," in a voice so gentle that Beatrice Gilliat hardly recognized herself. "Only, Sylvia, it was not because—but you *don't* love Doctor Trewartha, child?" hysterically.

"No, no;" beginning to chafe the cold hands, through which, now and then, ran a shiver of flame, and watching the blue lines that crept slowly about the tremulous mouth.

"There has been no one else—" her eyes distending with nervous excitement.

"I do not love any one in that way, I think," with slow, painful reflection, meaning to tell the exact truth and believing that she had. For Victor Hurst had never smiled into her eyes with any longing, or held her hand with soft, fond clasp. No, they were nothing to each other.

"I don't see any difficulty, then, child;" with a weak, hollow laugh. "You only want time to become accustomed to the new idea. It is a curse for a woman to love first—that is a man's place; and when she usurps or falls into it unwarily, she pays the price in bitterness of soul. I tell you this;" her voice growing thin and shrill with some old remembrance. "You are both young and have a pleasant life before you. Sylvia, when I am gone you will be mistress of Rothermel. It is a grand old place."

But Sylvia shuddered. "Do not talk of that," she said, hoarsely.

"I was thinking of it through the night—I sleep so little now. How you and Eustace would be there, and your children. I wish there had been others besides him. One is the

Gilliat heritage or curse. I fancy the years will improve him —it generally does men, my dear, who find a good, sweet, patient wife. You will be that, I know."

"Be tranquil, dear Mrs. Gilliat," entreated Sylvia, for now the pulses were bounding like fiery steeds.

"Oh, my heart!" She threw her head back with a gasp, and her face wore the waxen whiteness of death.

Sylvia's first impulse was to scream for help, but she stifled the cry that rose to her lips.

"What can I do?" chafing the cold face with her soft hands.

"That little vial—five drops—a wine-glass of water."

Sylvia was but an instant in preparing it, and held it to the chattering lips.

"How quick and quiet you are, little nurse," with a faint, returning smile. "Promise me, child; it may not be for long."

"Yes," in a hoarse whisper, as if it were better to murder her own soul than this woman's body.

"Bring me that pillow, please. I was foolish to be so weak when the Doctor warned me. 'No excitement,' he said. But it was so much to me."

"Perhaps I had better call the nurse," Sylvia exclaimed, trembling in every limb.

"No, let us keep our little secret;" with a wan smile. "Your Doctor Trewartha would scold me soundly if he knew it. What a bear he is at times! Here, hold my hand. I like to have you near me."

She seemed to drowse after that. Madelon coming in, smiled and nodded her head over her mistress's tranquillity. Sylvia sat like a stone. Fate had girt her in on every side.

But when they would have congratulated her, she said— "Give me a month of freedom that I may the better know my own mind."

"Sylvia, you are a weak fool!" her mother replied, angrily.

"Any other girl would jump at the chance of being mistress at Rothermel. And Mrs. Gilliat is so fond of you."

But Mr. Gilliat only folded his hands over her fair head, and murmured, "My little girl: my little girl: God bless you!"

When Eustace Gilliat's debts had been paid, and himself forgiven through his mother's intervention, who resolutely believed him no worse than other young men, he had come to St. Albans because he could not see his way clear to go anywhere else. He brought his beautiful trotters, and his choice wines, that had cost him a small fortune abroad; installed himself in two rooms on the farther side of the spacious hotel, and grumbled to his man, a keen, profligate French valet. Miss Redmond he voted a bore.

"A silly little fool!" he said. "But since there's such a scarcity of women here, she will be better than none."

For he considered himself an excellent judge of horses, wines, and women, young as he was; and, to do him justice, he had had considerable experience with all three. The fine wrinkles in his colorless face, and the blasé look in his eyes, told their own story of dissipation.

So he prepared himself for a desperate flirtation with "little Sylvia." Nearly two years had elapsed since their last meeting. But he found her so different from the child of his chance dreams, the Sylvia who had run wild about Rothermel, admiring everything and everybody, and listening with interest to his wonderful exploits.

He was no hero in her eyes now; she had seen manlier men. And this little exquisite, with pale, perfumed locks, faded face, drawling voice, and expensive diamonds, did not in the least captivate her fancy. From the very first she shrank from him in disgust, as if he carried some vile taint about with him. Yet older ladies admired and petted, applauded his feeble witticisms, rode behind his elegant grays; and young men pronounced him a "good fellow," since he was lavish with his wines and cigars.

In Kirke Gilliat's heart of hearts there was loathing and contempt for this weak, foolish, dissolute son of his. He had an utter abhorrence of those vices, and almost a hatred for the shallow, vapid nature. The boy had never been strong, and childish indulgence had laid the foundation of some of the evils, while others must have rooted themselves in radical inherent wickedness. He had never been able to stimulate him to the least ambitious effort. His sensuous nature grasped at every pleasure, no matter how widely he might scatter throes of pain. His virtues were puny and feeble, his vices very giants; indolence and selfishness were his ruling passions. That he was lavish, was due to no generous emotion; he possessed a weak pride which was gratified in spending money like a prince.

Had God cursed him in this son? Sometimes he thought so.

His mother clung to him as a certain kind of women only can. She had a vein of slow, devouring jealousy in her temperament. If Eustace had grown into a fine, manly fellow, in whom his father's love and pride could have centred, she would have experienced a dull, grudging hatred. She must always stand first. Perhaps it was because she did not feel so very secure of her empire, though from the day on which Kirke Gilliat had married her, up to the present, she had no cause for complaint.

But now, in her failing health, her son's destiny appalled her a little. It was possible, in the event of her death, for her husband to marry again, and in the happiness of a new love, make his eldest-born an outcast. Rothermel would forget them both, as if they had never existed.

This is why she had so favored Sylvia Redmond. It was best that Eustace should marry speedily, before some new extravagance angered his father beyond forgiveness.

Eustace Gilliat missed of his "steep flirtation." Sylvia's womanliness was founded on a rock where he was concerned. The old half-sisterly acquaintance could not be refused; but

there Eustace Gilliat found an impassible barrier. At first his vanity was sorely wounded.

"I'd like to have the breaking-in of my pretty lady," he said, with a coarse oath, to Jules, his man. "If she were a princess she could hardly carry her head more loftily. Suppose I marry her? It would be an awful bore; but I should have some rights she would be bound to respect."

Jules grinned, showing his white, even teeth, and shrugged his small shoulders.

"Monsieur is right, marriage is a bore. He would find it intolerable."

Yet the idea rather pleased the weak brain of Eustace Gilliat After all, it might not be so bad. It would serve to restore him to favor with his father, give him a position of more respectability and power; and if he found the chain galling, he could easily slip it off for a few weeks. There would be no opposition from Mrs. Redmond—but then, what woman would have the courage to refuse her daughter's hand to the heir of Rothermel?

Then he sounded his mother. It was well to have her on his side.

For a moment, she hesitated. Eustace's wife, of all women, should have a fortune in her own right, and Sylvia's would not be very extensive. But she had birth, beauty, and some accomplishments; and if Eustace were married, it might be an excellent thing for them all, a cutting of the gordian knot of anxiety.

A desultory courtship had come of this resolve, growing warmer when he found himself held at a distance, until it had culminated in a proposal, which had been rejected, through some girlish whim, Eustace fully believed.

And this was why Mrs. Gilliat had taken the matter in hand. For the past month she had seen much of Sylvia, and had come to admire her courage, truth, and bright winsome ways. This morning the child had appeared an absolute necessity to her, and pleading proved the more easy matter.

So Sylvia Redmond found herself engaged, with no tender gladness or strong yearning on her part. Fate had thrust her into it, and held her there with a giant's clasp. How could she disappoint Mr. Gilliat, whom she really loved, and who caught at the marriage as eagerly as the rest? for, after all, the salvation of one's children is nearest. How could she thwart the invalid whose very life, as it were, lay in her hands, the friend who had showered upon her so many tokens of affection? And had she the courage to oppose her mother's will, which could be so strong and unreasonable?

Every womanly fibre of her soul rose up in protest. It seemed to her that when she came to the marriage, her unutterable loathing would make itself known to those about her, and some brave hand would be stretched forth to rescue her. She could not believe God would allow such an iniquity to be consummated.

Perhaps, too, she had a weak hope that the engagement would prove irksome to Eustace. And then she was so engrossed with Mrs. Gilliat, that she strove to put by her own misery. If she dared take any friend in council, Ruth, Doctor Trewartha, or clear-eyed Mrs. McRae. Ah, if she might only go back to Cragness! Even the quiet home of the Braisteds was tempting.

They were riding behind the beautiful grays one afternoon, when they strayed into a well-known road. Sylvia's heart beat with a strange nervous apprehension. They passed a few groups of children playing in shady nooks, or wading with little bare feet in the wayside streams. There was the wide, cheerful Cragness village, looking less compact for the large gardens and orchards smiling between. Janet McRae would have no crowding.

Presently they passed two men in earnest conversation. Sylvia would have turned, but it was too late. The younger one glanced up, flushed, and bowed in a stately fashion, which she returned with scarlet cheeks.

"It's a familiar face," began Eustace, with his slow drawl. "I can't remember though, and I'm good at faces too. Delcroix used to say in Paris that there wasn't my match for remembering a face; but they were generally women's, and pretty."

Sylvia uttered no response. In the fortnight since she had seen Victor Hurst, her whole destiny had changed. Had he heard? Would he care?

"Who was it, Sylvia?"

"A connection of Mrs. McRae's," evasively. "You have heard me speak of her."

"That burly old giantess, who so terrifies your mother?"

"Yes," indifferently.

"But *I've* seen the face, Sylvia," in a tone of weak pettishness.

"Probably. He has charge of the quarry up yonder, though I think—," slowly, as if she might be betraying a confidence, "that she means to make him her heir."

"Does he live with her?"

"Not now. He was there awhile last spring. Look at those beautiful ferns,"—with a strangling in her throat, as if she could not pursue the subject farther.

Eustace Gilliat was jealous of anything she had ever known, with the vague consciousness that she held a life apart from his. Men of this narrow mental calibre are invariably suspicious and cruel.

He would not leave the subject. "You saw a good deal of him, then?"

"Yes;" leaning back amid the cushions, wearily.

A handsome man, with all this wealth at his command, was no mean rival. Perhaps she *had* cared for him.

His face gloomed over with a sullen silence. And then Sylvia, in her misery, asked herself why she had allowed this man the right to control or question.

He was moody all the homeward way, nursing a sense of

injury. And she was glad to be handed out at last—glad to throw herself on the bed in her own room, with a torturing headache, and come down no more that evening.

Yet, a nature like Sylvia's has many alternations. When she rose the next morning, bright and well, she could hardly resist being happy. And as Eustace was absent nearly all day, her spirits rose. Mrs. Gilliat was better, and Doctor Trewartha had chatted a long while in the pleasant parlor. He could render himself exceedingly fascinating and entertaining; and now he brought out the riches of his mind for his patient, who, most of all, needed to have her thoughts directed from herself. Mr. Gilliat followed him out on the porch and down the broad steps. There had been no opportunity to exchange a word, and she, poor child, what had she to say?

Eustace drew her out to the walk that evening, shaded on one side by the grove of great oaks, and lighted from the open windows of the house.

"Sylvia," he began, "I made a discovery to-day. Your friend's name is Hurst, it seems."

"My friend?" with a kind of repellant dignity.

"Yes." The tone he meant for scorn fell far short of the mark. "And we met him that night at Bohmerwald."

He looked eagerly into her face as he uttered this. He had so much of the brute instinct in him, that he would have liked to catch her arm and shake her until she confessed all she knew.

"I remember," poising her head with the touch of superiority and reticence that was maddening.

"And he remembered, doubtless," with a sneer.

"I think not. We never spoke of it. Of course I knew the name, and, I believe, I should have recognized the face anywhere."

"A low, vulgar upstart! Hewing stone is a congenial occupation for him," he flung out angrily.

he turned and faced him, a bright scarlet spot on each cheek.

"He is neither low nor vulgar," she said. "The atmosphere at Mrs. McRae's is as pure and sweet as the finest in the land. If there had been anything in his past life which would not have borne scrutiny, he would never have been asked there. It is a palace where only worth gains entrance."

He was awed by her brave, unembarrassed manner. After a long while he said, rather more softly—

"It is strange you did not talk that night over. It had its picturesque element, with that fantastic musician. I have seen his counterpart abroad many a time."

"I dare say Mr. Hurst had forgotten. The more stirring events in men's lives crowd out such unimportant episodes."

"But I remember that your governess thought him handsome;" rather bitterly.

"I think she was right," in a dry, hard tone. "There is mamma looking for me."

She had not heard the other story, then? He had sworn that he would never forgive the blow. An under-current of jealousy and hate prompted him to revenge it.

CHAPTER XXII.

Sylvia Redmond understood the grudging jealousy; she had seen it in childhood, and never knew how her sweet-humored and generous admiration had shamed it. But this passion held a man's vindictiveness as well. And the deeper hate she knew nothing of, since Eustace had wisely kept that discreditable incident to himself.

He had learned a good deal that day. Sylvia and Hurst had been in the same house for weeks, in the neighborhood for months. He had seen Hurst at the quarry—a great, handsome, agile fellow, with a kingly presence, as if born to rule. His very existence was hateful. Some subtle instinct told him that Victor stood between him and Sylvia. And though Cragness was a wild compared to stately Rothermel, with its luxuriance and beauty, it would be no mean heritage.

But it appeared altogether improbable to him that a man, with such prospects in the distance, would be toiling in a quarry, or even overlooking a gang of rude workmen. It showed his coarse, grovelling nature; and Eustace Gilliat's lips curled superciliously at the thought.

He also discovered, through Jules, that Victor Hurst's pathway was not quite exempt from thorns. There was a kind of covert rebellion in the quarry. Acting on Mrs. McRae's orders, liquor had been forbidden.

Victor had seen enough of its evils at Weareham, besides his own invincible dislike of the practice. So when Jarvis continued his indulgence in spite of remonstrance, there remained but one step—to discharge him. This was accordingly done. Jarvis lounged around a few days in the vicinity, and then

rather sullenly begged to be taken back. It was really wiser, Victor thought, than to have him idling about and interfering with the others.

"You have made a mistake, young sir," exclaimed Janet McRae in her brisk tone. "The man was in some trouble last summer, I believe. And when you were well rid of him, it was best so to stay."

"I was not well rid of him. That was the difficulty. If he would only leave the place."

"I should make him."

Victor smiled rather dubiously.

"Suppose it comes to a trial of strength—wills?"

"I am the master here;" and a white line of resolution showed about his mouth.

"Very well, very well!" laughing in her heartsome, breezy fashion. "You will do, I think;" studying him shrewdly. "But are you not confining yourself too closely? You are a rare guest at Cragness."

"I have little time," coloring warmly. "And the house is already full of guests."

"There is always room for you, mind. I am an old woman, and I do not like to be neglected. The truth is out."

It was but half a truth, however. She felt a little irritated at the non-success of her matrimonial scheme, which did not seem to advance a step.

"I do not wish it to be construed into neglect," he answered with grave politeness. "My father is fond of having me spend the evenings with him. Doctor Trewartha has worked wonders in his case."

"Trewartha is in high feather at St. Albans;" and it seemed as if there was a little displeasure in her tone. "He is going over to the aristocracy fast. There's a grand lady staying there whose case has puzzled the whole medical faculty, I believe; and he has tried his hand with remarkable success. As if it were anything but idleness, and dissipation, and whims. I'm

near to seventy, and have never had a troublesome nerve in my body; but I'm not a fine, finical woman, thank the Lord!"

"I heard him say he had a case there," Victor answered, absently.

"Yes. The Gilliats are lords in one of the southern counties. He has been senator from his district, and minister abroad; and Mrs. Gilliat is a remarkably handsome woman, I believe. Now she has time to nurse all her whims and ailments."

She gave her old contemptuous snort, and wheeled round as if defiantly confronting an enemy.

"And since I am gossiping, I may as well say that Sylvia Redmond has taken a fool and a fortune—the Gilliat heir! They are to be married in the fall. I hope Margaret Redmond is satisfied."

It was true, then. He had feared as much the day he saw them together. And had not this been Sylvia's dream?

"The child does as she is bidden, though I expected better things of her." An indignant flutter still in her voice. "Margaret Randolph ran away with a poor gentleman, the most useless thing on God's earth. Why, yonder weed is of more real service. Perhaps she loved him—if so, it was soon over. I never heard that he treated her badly; but he had no energy, no back-bone, and when his money was spent he fell back upon writing prosy essays and translating Latin poems. He could not go to work like a man, but must palter over a sleepy spark of genius, with a helpless, inefficient woman tied round his neck, and frail of course. I've not much faith in genius. They used to make long visits at the Braisteds, and heaven only knows how they managed. I would have gone out washing or sewing;" her face flushing with the energy of her feelings. "Sylvia was a little yellow-haired girl about nine, I think, when one winter her father went to New York to hear about some situation or other, and never came back."

"But he died—"

"I suppose so," snapping off her words as if they were hard to credit. "The tidings came in a roundabout way. I'd be loth to think wrong of any one, but I don't believe she was sorry. She went home to her father, was forgiven, and bequeathed a share of the family property. Then she journeyed abroad with her friend Mrs. Gilliat—our poor American moths must singe themselves in Paris flame. Sylvia and her governess were left behind."

There was a pause, in which Mrs. McRae broke a branch of cedar and fanned herself violently with it.

"I think little Sylvia worthy of a better fate, unless she is fool enough to love young Gilliat, who isn't the kind of man I should choose for a daughter of mine," with a dry, derisive smile. "But girls of the present day think only of a fine establishment, and Sylvia was badly bitten with the glories of Rothermel. Trewartha declares that it is the finest estate in the country. I wish her joy;" in an ironical tone. "There! I've gossiped like any old fish-woman. Come to tea to-morrow night—I shall expect you. Daisy," to the sleek, shining mare, "stir your steps, my fine lady."

So, nodding, she drove off. Victor watched the wheels as they spun round, leaving a track of fine dust in their wake, and studied the strong, upright figure. How mercilessly she had demolished Sylvia's mother! And Sylvia!

Then he thought of the night at Bohmerwald. She *had* been bitten by the Gilliat grandeur even then, and that puny, cowardly fellow was a hero in her eyes. He had been wild enough to envy them, to imagine their birth, wealth, and station stood for true nobility in the world. That foolish, long-ago time, with its boyish hopes turned to dust and ashes, fretted him now as he mused over it. Yet he was glad that never by word or look had he tried to bring himself to Sylvia's mind, to be despised and laughed at.

And yet how royally sweet and piquant she had been in some moods, with her soft, dewy clear eyes, her red lips quiv-

ering like rose-leaves in a balmy wind, and the silvery voice dropping liquid tones like a half-hidden streamlet on a summer day. Bright, changeful, radiant, a creature to be loved and petted, shielded from all storms and adversities. Would she have the care and tenderness with her gold?

Then he went back to the quarry. He knew well that there was a spirit of dissatisfaction gaining ground, and he suspected, in spite of the required promise, that Jarvis and two or three others brought their drams in their pockets. But he determined to struggle against the tide alone. Mrs. McRae should not find him weak at the most important crisis.

It came before he was really prepared, and in a manner he little expected. One Monday morning he found the men drawn up in martial array in front of the excavation.

They all touched their hats, so formidable a weapon is politeness. Jarvis stepped forward as spokesman.

The story briefly told was this—the miners in the next county had struck for wages as well as the stone-cutters in two or three districts, and they demanded the modest advance of half a dollar a day. There would be no more work until the request was complied with.

The hot blood rushed to Victor's brow, and steely gleams flashed from his eyes.

"Your wages were twenty cents a day more than those in any quarry of which we could hear," he replied, calmly. "It is not my province altogether to answer this demand; but if it were, I should decline at once. I will give you an answer at twelve."

They bowed and retired. Victor drove to Cragness immediately, but Mrs. McRae had gone to the mill, so he followed her thither.

"Well, what do you propose?" her strong, shrewd face kindling into a peculiar smile as she listened to the story.

"I *should* prefer to part with some of the men, and I think

the wages sufficiently high. But for miles around they are standing out on strikes."

"Have you taken your contract into consideration?"

"I could hold out a month, if no assistance came to hand; but I fancy that I could find half the men I want in Taunton. It is not altogether the wages. There is a grudge against me because I am young, and was not brought up to the business."

That fired her. She would stand by a comrade until the last gasp.

"It is nothing to them so long as you understand it. Let them leave in a body, insolent wretches that they are! Not another cent will I pay. I think they all know Janet McRae's word."

Victor was relieved and armed. He went back and gave the mutinous men their answer. Half a dozen hung about undecided. It was plain that they had reconsidered and were loth to go.

"You have had very little to complain of;" and Victor's clear voice rang out sharp and crisp. "Any man who is dissatisfied with the wages may pack up his tools and go at once."

He was in no mood to parley, so he turned away haughtily.

"He's backed by a woman," exclaimed Jarvis, with a coarse laugh. "We don't give in to no such rule, boys."

A faint cheer went up, the echoes reaching Victor, and a little frown contracted his brow.

But that evening half a dozen recreant ones waited upon him at the cottage and expressed entire willingness to resume work in the morning.

"Very well," he answered. "I shall go to Taunton to look up some new hands. You may take your old places."

He paid them a brief call before he went, and found matters progressing satisfactorily. The men were rather ashamed, but not sullen, and accepted the situation frankly.

Victor Hurst spent most of his day at Taunton. A stone-cutter had mentioned two or three idle quarrymen, and they in turn knew of several others. By night he had a dozen engaged for the ensuing week. But on his return home he learned that the disaffected had visited the quarry in a mob, and compelled the few to retire.

It had come, then, to open war. Victor considered well what step was most prudent, and when he had resolved, paid Mrs. McRae a call and detailed the particulars.

"Excellent," she said. "It will not do to allow a few bullies to rule us in that fashion. One or two warm receptions will suffice for them, I think. Trewartha admires what he terms your pluck, immensely. He will laugh over this. Nay, do not go—" as he rose. You so seldom take a holiday.

The clear blue eyes softened to persuasion, and, as he had no good excuse, he stayed. There were no guests, so Mrs. McRae summoned Ruth and left them together.

There had grown up between these two people a peculiar silent friendship. There was a fine strength in Ruth Garnier, steady nerves under the waxen skin, and a subtile light emanating now and then from her soul that attracted Victor. Her temperament was so healthy, so free from morbidness, and her thoughts flowed in such straightforward channels. They had lifted him out of himself more than once. She had never known the grinding exactions of poverty, nor the keener pangs of a conscience tortured in its ideas of right and wrong until it flies in the face of heaven with some almost blasphemous question or demand.

And though her occupations had been rather narrow, or at least confined to one sphere, her soul had grown noiselessly, unheeded even by herself. Perhaps never so much as in the last five months, but she had a way of pushing aside perplexing questions that did not concern her daily life. When she first had her lesson, for though Janet McRae had never put it in so many words, she *felt* instinctively what was required of

her; and had Victor been in the slightest degree lover-like, the womanly part of her nature would have understood and rebelled with the same pain that it had given her to see Sylvia and Trewartha together; but this slow pulse of friendship never sent any hot, questioning blood to her heart.

To-day she was calm and bright, with the warmth of an October sun rather than July's vivid heats. The sewing that had once been so much of a habit had fallen into disuse this summer, since there had been guests to entertain, and daily rides to the Hurst Cottage, with a not infrequent accompaniment of long calls.

They talked more than usual on this day. Doctor Trewartha, sauntering up the lawn at mid-afternoon, heard their voices in the shrubbery, and went straightway thither. She had been gathering a handful of late roses for Mrs. Hurst.

If Frank Trewartha had been in any doubt before, he knew now what touch of fire sped along his nerves like lightning. His passions were all marvellously under control, but this black demon could not be mistaken, and reared its crest with keen energy. While there had been no real danger he could afford to dally, to attract her to-day and let her go to-morrow; but what did this bloom on her cheek, and this dangerous softness of her deep eyes portend? Victor Hurst was undeniably handsome, and in such a mood as this might prove fascinating.

Victor went home rather more elated than usual. He had gained sufficient courage to measure himself with his peers, and the result had not been absolute discomfiture. It was well to have his armor bright, and fitting well, before he went out to try the broader world.

The mood had not altogether left him when he rambled down to the deserted quarry the next afternoon. He remembered the sweet, petulant lips that had called it his studio, and he smiled softly at the conceit. Also the older fancy that, armed with the work of brain and hand, he would one day dare to

present himself before her. He could never do it now. He dimly guessed, from the treasures of Doctor Trewartha's house, what Rothermel must be, with its beauty, its art and statuary gathered from the choicest of every clime. His work would be crude and paltry beside it.

He had half-buried a strong box, such as the workmen used for their tools, at the side of the rock in a leafy recess. The quiet hours that were stolen from his other cares he had spent here, nursing his old ambition. After his duties here were all performed, he would still have years enough to make something out of himself. Life was so much larger and grander than he used to fancy it amid the smoke at Weareham. In this fresh inspiring air, and with these people of broader souls, his own was coming up to its full stature.

He unlocked his treasure-trove now, and took out his tools, his work. He was in a peculiar mood to-day, and picked up a little bust for which he had obtained a block of marble. It was nearly finished, yet it seemed as if all his life he might go on adding touches, and it would still fall short of his dream. But after a few strokes he dropped his tiny chisel, and leaning his chin on the palm of his hand, began to dream. It was so weirdly still here in the woods on this August day, quite as if he was in some far realm of imagination.

How many moments elapsed before a step startled him he hardly knew. He sprang up flushed and haughty to face Doctor Trewartha, who laughed genially.

"Upon my word, Hurst, I am a friend and no dangerous enemy. Don't glower at me in that fearful manner."

The startled look relaxed, but the flush grew deeper.

"I really could not help it. Your mother said you had gone down to the quarry, and being in an idle mood, I took to rambling round when I could not find you, until I caught a glimpse of your figure here."

Victor felt that his secret had been discovered. How many times he had been tempted to confess it to Trewartha! But

now a great doubt and misgiving seized him. What if this verdict should be as crushing as another."

"Well," Trewartha said, a little wounded at the silence, "shall I go as I came? I need not force myself upon your confidence."

"No, no," reaching out his hand; "my work may look poor and paltry to your eyes; but judge me from the small chance, rather than the scanty results."

Trewartha came nearer with that. Victor tumbled over two others done in the quarry-stone, his manner confused and diffident.

"Oh, this is a success! I never saw Janet McRae put in stone before; but it is a correct translation of the woman's strength, the outer bark of roughness, and the grand, imperious, arbitrary soul within. Did she sit to you?"

"No," in a little surprise.

"You carry her about well in your heart, then. I've seen worse things than that done by finished artists. Does *she* know it?"

"She does not," rather frigidly. "It has been my idle-hour amusement."

Trewartha's mellow laugh floated down the ledge in rippling echoes.

"And this?" Something beyond a head and shoulders, for opposite, almost touching the face and yet apart, was a tiny rough crag with a slender thread of water trickling down.

"I think I know," in a slow, musing tone. "The myth of Tantalus. It seems to me the old heathen had just what he deserved. Why have you put a new meaning into his face?"

"It stood for something else with me;" in a half hesitating tone, dropping the large lids over eyes that were steel gray now.

Trewartha scrutinized the young face, where boyish lines or emotion came so rarely.

"You have studied before," he said, with an almost angry impetuousness. "It is not an altogether new thing, working out bits of your soul in stone. And yet I don't see how you ever found any opportunity—"

"I never did," calmly, the face growing pale and set. "This thought entered my mind the first day I went to Taunton with Mrs. McRae. In a marble-yard a figure was being carved for a tombstone. It may be a long way from that to art—"

"You are bridging it over fiercely, Hurst! This is Sylvia Redmond, only you have fashioned the child's face too high and fine for the wife of Eustace Gilliat. In ten years she will lower to his level, become a weak, fashionable, fine woman. Another poor moth caught."

"It might have been different, I think," averting his face, and chipping at the bit of gray rock under his hand.

"Might have beens are the wrecks of the world. You find them stranded on all the shores along life," and Trewartha gave a keen, satirical smile. "Is it a kind of regretful excuse appealing to our self-love? So few of us would be willing to admit that we had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. And surely Sylvia would have to go farther back than her parents to find much stamina."

"So you saddle the children with their father's sins!" Victor exclaimed, as if in a mood of unreasonable anger.

"Hasn't Holy Writ declared it? Yet men and women go on perpetuating themselves, their follies, weaknesses, crimes, and wonder that the world is full of sin. Faugh! But that's theology or ethics rather than art. So you have taken this up for the first time this summer?"

Victor felt curt and ungracious. He was sore at heart, his natural disposition, circumstances, and the tenor of his whole life disposed him to reticence. And then the keen, mortifying thought of failure stung him to the quick. So he studied Trewartha's face furtively.

A face cultured to something larger than mere worldly uses; an outgrowth of health, satisfaction, experience, and rare intelligence. If he could have such a friend!

"It dates farther back than that," he said, with a rapid, forced frankness, as if in the next moment's mood he might repent and withdraw the confidence. "The only business fancy of my boyhood was engraving; but a man who would have taken me, was a person of very loose, irregular habits, and I must have gone to New York alone. A higher authority than mine overruled it. Then as I neared manhood I took to rude sketching—like this."

From a time-worn portfolio, he produced several of the old sketches. Trewartha seated himself on the rock, and began to examine them.

"You had models?"

"I used to study the men in the shop, with their brawny arms, and chests, and resolute faces. Is it true that rough physical vigor and work drains the brain, starves it? This man was a drunkard—Connor. Was it the evil in him, or circumstances?"

"A little of both;" dryly. "You had a teacher?"

"Not for those."

"Ah, here is the Tantalus!" Trewartha raised his eyes and studied Victor's face critically. "I think I understand;" slowly, and with an air of penetration accenting the brow and eyes. "It was not mere physical thirst. It is a type of something finer, farther off; the desire for some end not distinctly in view, but felt, nevertheless; a soul process crying out through the blank, dark night; a passion that could not be put in words. Yes, I understand it;" half absently, as if he were talking to himself.

"When I came to have money of my own;" and Victor tried to steady his voice, that would be tremulous with all the ache and agony of the past, "when I was my own master, I took some lessons in painting."

"Well?" in a curious indrawn voice.

"It was a failure!" bitterly, with a keen remembered sting. "Look at that picture beyond!" indicating the slant sunshine on a bit of rock, and a clump of stunted bushes standing out distinctly in the still afternoon air. "As if even that simple thing were not utterly beyond a man's power of translation!"

"You tried such things—nature?"

"Yes. I learned then that I was never meant for an artist."

Trewartha saw the fine, struggling, but still enslaved soul in the tortured eyes, the skin where nerves full of red heat flamed up, and as suddenly turned ice-cold.

"No, Hurst, I don't think you were meant to paint rocks and trees, or still-life of any kind. You would be much more likely to strike a soul out of yonder marble; to bring some inner passion to the surface."

"You think that?" in a faint, unbelieving tone, the eyelids drooping over a great joy.

"I believe it with all my heart. But those things take—years."

"Yes;" with grateful, unappeased hunger.

"But I do not understand why you came down here, when the doors of Cragness were open to you. You read Janet McRae wrongly."

"I had myself to read as well;" in a hoarse, quavering voice.

"Ah, you geniuses have always a sore, sensitive pride that pricks you inwardly. If you had been afraid of failure you need not have confessed all. She would have waited cheerfully."

Victor made no reply. Trewartha rose and paced the small green enclosure, wondering at the pride or diffidence.

"Hurst," he began presently, "I think you know Janet McRae's intentions. She has reared a daughter, but that does not satisfy her. Like all strong-souled women she has a craving after a man-child. And you are of her lineage—a good

brave, old stock. Why not go up to yonder grim, gray mansion and take your birthright? It will come to you when she is dead. Is youth so pitiless that it must thrust aside help, love?"

"It is not that." Victor Hurst's voice had a curiously hollow sound in it, like a dying man's last grasp on life. "It is not that. She offered me a chance to begin life anew, and I had to do it in some other place beside Weareham. I came to work, to care for my parents. Whatever dreams I might have had, were my own," a fierce scarlet blazing up in his cheek. "When my duty is ended, when I am free, I shall leave Cragness for all time. You said she had a daughter—Cragness is Ruth Garnier's heritage."

"I never heard it so termed save by gossip."

"I think it will be right. I have no claim."

"There is something under all this, unreasoning child. Tell me truly—have you loved Ruth Garnier?" and Trewartha held his breath.

"Loved her? No." An air of surprise lifting the sharply-defined bronze brows.

"Well," Trewartha said, deliberately, "I will tell you my side of the story. There is no fool like an old fool! *I* love Ruth Garnier. Janet McRae has developed a handsome, healthy body—I shall quicken the soul. Yet I know it is her plan that you two shall marry."

"It could never, never be," in a slow, passionless, but assured tone. "It must be years before I marry—if ever."

"I have enough for her without Cragness. Madame McRae will be angry and storm—then, at the back of the April shower will shine the golden sun in its bed of peerless blue. Ruth will have a handsome dowry, and then—the lioness will be left alone in her lair. Think again, Victor Hurst, before you throw up your hand. Genius is never the worse for tender nurture, no matter what your hard, material souls may say in their foolish prating of inner development. I hold out to you a brother's hand. Think again."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Why not take the good the gods provided and be thankful? Was he to carry about with him forever the result and punishment of another man's sin? Was that God's justice and mercy? Ah, none knew more truly than he what the unused wealth of Cragness might do for him in saving hard, long, wearisome years. He had only to yield, to keep silence, to thrust the unclean thing out of sight.

He remembered one evening, when they had been sitting in the light of the blazing, odorous pine-logs, the brilliant glow shining full upon Janet McRae's strong, clear face, that she had said in answer to some whim of Sylvia Redmond—

"There never was a lord nor a lady among the McRaes, except as God made them; but you might call them from their graves and they could show hands with the cleanest. Not a crime nor stain, never any meanness, any foul grasping avarice, or the shadow of falsehood, which is always treason. A loyal, manful race."

There had been a flush and a flicker of pain in his mother's face, a sudden sinking in the lines that should have been able to show a brave front. And if he took his place up yonder he should be living a lie and a treason daily; if he confessed—he knew now that it was a sin Janet McRae would never forgive. Women were always pitiless to their fellow-women, and hunted them down. No, it could never be. Let him work out his own salvation. There were long, brave years before him, and out in the world he could fight this black shadow of fate, coming off conqueror.

But he took Trewartha's proffered hand

"I cannot tell you all my reasons," he said, in a voice still husky with the terror and shame that he kept bravely out of his face. "If there should ever come a day when you and she know them, I think you will absolve me from ingratitude, at least. I told Mrs. McRae months ago what I considered my duty. I have performed it faithfully since. The generous offer cannot be repaid; but I shall make myself no loss to her when I drop quietly out of the lives of all who have known me."

Trewartha had the grace of exceeding patience. It was worse than useless to rasp this fine, sensitive soul and drag up its secrets. Sooner or later every hidden thing came to light—it was one of nature's laws.

"Well," he said, "tell me the rest of your plans, or rather your story from that point. You gave up the painting?"

The straightforward voice was utterly devoid of curiosity, and the kindly beaming eyes were more than friendly.

"Yes. I had a verdict upon it, but before that I had convinced myself;" looking away at the distant blue mountain-tops.

"Then you threw yourself into the vexed breach?" and Trewartha laughed genially, a mellow salve to draw the stings from the other's wound.

"Yes. I still think the cause was good. The question was—should we fill rich men's warehouses at low prices simply because the present demand had ceased, and give them the weapon to fight us in the spring when business became brisk? Prices for labor come down so much more readily than they advance."

"Judging from your face, Hurst, I should say the whole question of trade was distasteful to you."

"I was put into it, pushed over on the labor side," and he gave a hollow, bitter laugh.

"And now you have taken the step deliberately."

"I am not ashamed of it. Whatever pride there may be

in my soul, God knows it is not that. But a man can't help longing for what he loves best, and floundering about in the sea of uncertainty until his foot touches the rock whereon he is to rear his standard or coral island. So I have tried to work my idea out in these bits of stone. I think faces and passions appeal to me more strongly than the sun glinting a bit of water, or a cluster of autumn leaves."

"You are right there."

Victor glanced up, eyes and cheeks aflame.

"Yes. In one sense those are remarkable, because they express the force of genius. The things that are lacking will come by practice. Fineness of touch—for see, this is marble and not Sylvia Redmond's soft, sinuous hair, and these nostrils lack her nervous flexibility. But the mouth has a dignity and strength beyond hers."

The discriminating praise was precious indeed.

"You mean to go on?"

"Yes. May I ask you to keep my secret? It is very dear to me."

"You expect to carve, and to subdue your mutinous rebels?" with his peculiar smile. "Your own weapon turned against you, Hurst."

"They have hardly my excuse. I do not believe it so much a question of wages as of supremacy. Jarvis and Finch brought their whisky-bottles in defiance of rules and promises. By mid-afternoon half the men were drunken and insolent, and cared little how the work was done. I have taken the quarry on certain conditions, and it is my duty to see them respected, enforced."

He looked as if he might do it easily, rising now and folding his lithe arms across his broad chest. And Trewartha felt for once nonplussed. This man neither cared to marry Ruth Garnier nor to have Cragness, it seemed.

"I shall be anxious to hear how you succeed, on Monday. Will you not give me a friend's place, Hurst? If you will

accept no pecuniary aid from any one, you might take a little interest, sympathy.

"I shall be very glad to have that from you," and he clasped Trewartha's hand in both of his. "If you will accept me as I am—it is no foolish, over-sensitive freak, believe me."

"We all have our little mysteries," was the answer, in a dry but not unpleasant tone. "Come up to the Cedars and study the beauty there. Perhaps I shall not be so poor a tutor, theoretically. And if you will forgive me for having surreptitiously discovered your secret—"

Victor smiled, and half inclined his head. Then he began to gather his tools and work, and stow them in their hiding-place.

"Are you going home? I will walk with you, then. I have not seen your father for several days."

These visits were rare treats to John Hurst. His long-dormant faculties had begun to assert their personality once more, though his limbs would always remain powerless.

At first he could hardly be content with this inactive, helpless state. His old anxiety for souls pressed hardly upon him.

"God will take care of them in His own way," said Mrs. McRae, in her strong, energetic manner. "That He has laid you aside is sure proof that your hardest labor is over. He is giving you time now to enjoy His works, spread out on every side. The burden and the heat of the day is for some one else."

Was it true that this lesson had yet to be learned? That God was in the whispering wind, the green, swaying gloom of the trees, the purple nights, and the rosy mornings? Was it possible that in His work he had forgotten this?

They had many an earnest discussion, these two persons, their sharp individuality clashing and engendering a healthy heat by the friction. But Trewartha's moods in the little cottage were

always genial. He brought up his half unbeliefs, his doubts, and his small cynicisms for John Hurst to controvert, and laughed soft and mellow as the hazy sun on an October day, when he was compelled to give up a point. But under the arguments was something that always left him in a more serious mood. This man had relinquished everything for his religion as surely as those who left all to follow Christ when he was upon earth. Part of the sacrifice might have been useless, but he gave manfully of the best he had. If in the great struggle his nerves had grown weak, and his brain confused, God surely could see that it had been done from most unselfish motives.

His nature had softened a good deal, it is true. He had come back to a child's passionate love for flowers and singing. Anah sewed and sang, in her soft, tremulous voice, all the old hymns that had stirred many a wandering or thoughtless soul in their little meetings. And sometimes, as now, Victor's fine tenor and Trewartha's baritone, with its organ-like cadences, made the air full of angel presences for the man going slowly down to the dark valley.

Trewartha glanced back at them in the moonlight. The fervor and faith was not all fanaticism, surely. And with it came an incongruous thought—where had Victor Hurst gathered all this unlikeness to either parent?

Monday soon came round. The men were there on the stroke of the bell, sixteen, old and new. They went to work without the slightest interruption, and continued until noon.

"Small fear of a riot," Victor said, laughingly, to the constable who had come from Taunton.

"They may be holding back," was the answer, in a shrewd tone.

And holding back they were. In the quiet of mid-afternoon there was a sudden onslaught upon the group of laborers, headed by Jarvis and Finch. The raiders were armed with heavy clubs.

"We're going to put a stop to this 'ere," exclaimed Jarvis, in a thick, unsteady tone. "Part of you men have been warned already. There'll not be another week's work done in this quarry until your white-livered boss comes up to wages!"

"We have a right to make our own bargains," returned the foremost of the gang.

"We'll see. Drop your hammers, men, or you'll be forced to. Do it peaceably, and not a soul shall be harmed."

The men kept steadily at their work as if not a word had been spoken. Their coolness exasperated the bully.

"At them!" he shouted, hoarsely, gathering effrontery from the fact that no one appeared to be within sight or hearing.

There was a sharp click of a pistol, and the hurried steps of those in waiting.

"This is for the man who strikes the next blow," said a cool, steady voice.

The rabble started in affright, and two or three of the most cowardly ones dashed through the narrow opening to the main road. Jarvis was seized from behind and disarmed before he could even turn. With a bitter oath he struggled to free himself. The party felt beaten without a blow.

"Secure that one as well," rang out the voice as clearly as before. "These two, Mr. Hurst, are the ringleaders?"

"Yes," Victor answered.

"Now, my men," addressing the rest, "if you choose to throw down your murderous weapons and go home in an orderly manner, nothing further will be done, but the next attempt will be met with no such leniency. These men" nodding to the laborers, "shall be protected in their duty, if it should require a guard for the next month. What will you do?"

The rioters threw down their clubs surlily, and gave the required promise.

"What is the matter?" asked Victor, as one of the laborers sat down upon a pile of hewn stone, turning ghastly pale.

"It's my arm—broken, I believe."

"Bring him some water. Let us see, King."

The arm, from midway between elbow and wrist, dangled helplessly.

"Broken, is it?" inquired Delafield, the officer. "That makes a case at once. Which one struck you,—Jarvis?"

"No, I wish it had been. He's the worst of the lot. He just missed my head. Finch gave me this clip."

I think I should have enjoyed it being Jarvis better myself," declared Victor. "You must go to the village immediately and have it set."

"We can take him in the wagon," subjoined Delafield. "I have just sent Markham for it."

Jarvis, with his arms pinioned behind him, gnashed his teeth in impotent rage. Glancing at Victor, where he stood calm, self-possessed, and with the peculiar refinement of beauty most exasperating to a coarse bully, he muttered an oath of vengeance.

Markham soon made his appearance with the wagon. The two ruffians sullenly took their places. King was assisted in, and they drove villageward.

Finch was the greatest sufferer, as he alone had struck a blow, so he was committed for assault; while Jarvis, after being bound over to keep the peace, was discharged with a severe reprimand. Matters went on quietly enough at the quarry for the next ten days.

Mrs. McRae came down to see the injured man, who was snugly settled in a cottage with his wife and children.

"Let his wages go on," she said, peremptorily to Victor, "and charge it to my share. I hope the ruffians have had lesson enough to last them. Not one of them is to be taken back, if he should go down upon his knees. Remember that!"

Victor smiled at her energetic manner.

"He has done just the right thing all the way through," she said, decisively, to Anah Hurst, as if there had been some

danger of the meek woman controverting the statement. "He is a son to be proud of, though he is sadly headstrong and wilful at times. Some of the sturdy old Scotch blood runs in his veins."

"It was hardly worth the sensation it created," commented Victor, when his mother repeated this praise. "I do not wonder my father felt called upon to fight the demon of intemperance in the manner he did. It *is* the bane of our working-classes."

Anah smiled in a pleased, grateful fashion. There had been but two words in the speech for her—"my father." As she saw these two men, with no tie of blood between them, being brought so near together again, her whole soul was filled with thankfulness.

"I think I misjudged him in the old days," John Hurst would say, softly, to his wife. "I was so afraid of danger for him. I wanted to do the best—to lead him to God—but—" tremulously—"he is finding his own way. It was too high a work to be trusted to my feeble hands. God did not deem me worthy."

"Yet God sends you the fruits," in her tender, comforting manner.

For Victor seldom strayed into those hard, skeptical, unreasoning moods. Life was so much grander out here among the mountains, where a man saw the works of God daily. Adversity may be a good teacher, but is it always necessary to suffer in order to be able to enjoy? Do not some poor souls hunger and thirst until all appetite is gone? And when at last the starved life blossoms palely, the fountain is filled, and the stunted trees begin to bear fruit, the zest of youth and hope is over, and the grave only looks promising in its awesome rest.

Prosperity, and the friendship of such a man as Trewartha, was rapidly developing the best and richest qualities in Victor Hurst's nature. A broad, generous life does more toward making noble men and women than any purely ascetic train-

ing that starves one faculty to develop others. And though many brave souls have come up through much tribulation, found their way to the mountain-tops over thorny paths, indeed; there is still in minds, not strongly tinctured by self-love and pride, an awful consciousness of loss, a dreary remembrance of the time when a kindly hand might have been stretched out and was withheld, when a word would have encouraged and there was silence, when a smile would have mellowed and goldened the chilly atmosphere, and the lips, whose giving would not have impoverished, were still and cold.

Affairs at the quarry went on quietly enough. True, there was a rumor of Jarvis having been seen in the vicinity; but he troubled none of the workmen. Victor felt quite assured that he would never be able to get together a sufficient number of the disaffected to make another assault, after the first had been so ignominiously frustrated.

The new men were prompt, energetic, and orderly. He always spent his mornings with them; but much of the afternoon was devoted to his own dream, in which business had no part nor lot. Trewartha had gone carefully over the three pieces with him, criticising, suggesting, and explaining points in which Victor was groping about in misty darkness. Of the three, the Tantalus pleased Trewartha best; for he read in it the deeper spiritual thirst of the soul whose conception it had been, and the hours of patient toil that under so many disadvantages had still fashioned it with the most loving care.

One afternoon Victor had been unusually busy, superintending the loading of stone. A side switch of a quarter of a mile had been run out to the quarry, and the cars soon traversed the distance from thence to Taunton. King was not yet able to be about, and on such days as these every one lent a hand. At last the derrick ceased its creaking, the grim old engine uttered its hoarse shriek and blew out its volume of dense smoke, winding slowly around the side of the rocky ledge.

It was a sultry afternoon late in August, and Victor felt too warm and too tired for his usual recreation. Tantalus would utter no moan there in his darkness and silence.

Yet one of those peculiar subtile moods that we afterward call presentiments was strong upon him, and seemed to lure him thither by promise of coolness and restful quiet. His own little nook had become a place of delightful refuge to him: nature's studio indeed, with its fragrant airs, its ever changing light and shade.

To-day the leaves scarcely stirred. The pines seemed drooping and dusty, the stray spires of golden rod growing in stunted groups were pale and dingy, and the tufts of balsam had a dried and wintry look already.

Before he reached the place he heard a stir and crunching on the ground as of a footstep.

"It is Trewartha," he thought, springing forward.

Then a crash that seemed to shiver even the rock to atoms, so distorted was it to his surprised ear.

He took the scene in at a lightning glance. Jarvis had rifled his box, whose treasures were better than buried gold, and at a blow from the self-constituted iconoclast, Tantalus' dumb longing had perished in fragments. The face of Sylvia gleamed white, imploring, Victor thought, and the brawny arm, with its huge hammer, was about to scatter ruin a second time, when Victor sprang forward with one passionate, well-directed blow; the weapon fell, and the miscreant rolled over in the short, worn turf.

It seemed to Victor, in the first moment of rage, as if he could have beaten him to a jelly; then the prostrate figure appealed curiously to him, almost disarming in its helplessness the bitter resentment. He touched it with his foot, for the sight of the bloated purple face sickened him.

The wretch had been only stunned. He rolled his bleared eyes with a groan.

For weeks Jarvis had been going from bad to worse. No

family ties restrained him, and the money he managed to pick up in odd jobs had been spent for rum, since any clump of woods was sufficient couch for these warm nights.

Victor gathered the two faces out of the ruins: the McRae seeming to smile grimly and exultant, and the poor, pale, beseeching Sylvia—it was as if he had rescued her from some great peril, and his soul gave an answering, vehement throb.

"Wretch!" he exclaimed, as the man began to writhe, "how dared you? Was there nothing else, but you must steal like a thief into this place to blast and destroy?"

"I finished your fine work for you!" with an oath and a coarse sneer; "only I didn't do half enough!" and Jarvis raised himself on his elbow, groaning with a twinge of pain.

A dog could hardly have been of less import in Victor's eyes, and yet he knew the man was an immortal being. Was he? and the old skeptical doubt rushed over him. What did God mean to do with these vile, miserable souls in the end? However, his passion had passed, and instead of vengeance there was only loathing in his heart. So he looked at him out of clear, masterly eyes, that made Jarvis cower beneath the indignant glance.

"I hate you!" he said, angrily. "What business had you to come here and lord it over us, because yon old woman backed you? She took you out of the slough, and you give yourself fine airs, but they don't go down with me."

Victor smiled scornfully over his prostrate foe.

"I have not lorded it over any one," he returned. "It has been an even bargain on both sides—fair work and fair wages. If you do not choose to take them, stay away then. Indeed, that was your part of the agreement."

"I agreed to nothing," sullenly.

"I believe you *did* promise to keep the peace, but your word is like yourself, not to be trusted."

Victor ran briefly over the case in his mind. To hand the man over to the authorities would be dragging himself into notoriety as well, a thing that he did not at all covet. And when he caught sight of the bruised face and swollen eye, and saw the twinges of pain that passed over the features, his anger was satisfied. As for the keener grief, nothing dragged out of this brutish nature could compensate for that. So he began to gather up the tools and his remaining precious relics.

Something in Victor Hurst's quiet, superior air maddened the low instincts of the prostrate bully more than the bitterest speech could have done. The refinement and manly beauty roused him, as the contrast always does an ignorant, grovelling nature, that is fain to drag every human soul down to its own low estate.

He turned once. Jarvis was making unsteady attempts to rise.

"I give you fair warning;" and the voice rang out sharply clear. "Cross my path again and I will see if there is no law to protect a man from a bully and a base, dishonorable coward. That is all."

Jarvis looked after him, and shook his fist in impotent rage.

"I'll be even with you yet, cursed upstart that you are!" he muttered. "Law! There's a way of taking the law in my own hands that you mayn't like so well, especially if it should chance to spoil your handsome picture. What a hand the man has—like a sledge hammer." And Jarvis rubbed himself ruefully, groaning at the results of the blow and the fall.

"Yes, I'll be revenged!" trying to collect his scattered senses. "Ill dog him in another way. We'll see who'll win this game, my hearty."

Victor Hurst, walking rapidly away, heard none of the threats, though they would not have added to his soreness of heart.

He studied the marble face a long while that night before he

consigned it to the old chest that held the remnant of his drawings. The other attempts had long ago perished in the flames.

Was she happy—the Sylvia, in that charming nest among the mountains? She had won what women most desired—smiling with a little pain and scorn. And then if—as Trewartha had more than half suggested—this weak, characterless Eustace Gilliat had been her girlish fancy, nothing could have made any difference, nothing!

CHAPTER XXIV.

Janet McRae was looking out of the window at the old oak, struck by lightning many years ago, but not killed. Every summer the scattering foliage had grown smaller and smaller. This year one twig, high up, had budded, and showed a handful of leaves that withered at midsummer. Now it was dead.

She was thinking of herself. It seemed of late that she had felt hardly so strong and vigorous. A weak, womanly longing to lay down the power in her tired hands and rest a while, sometimes seized her. And though she would have confessed this to no one, she had not made the headway with Victor Hurst that she had counted upon. Something in his silent strength baffled her. She could crowd him into no post of honor. She could clothe him with no authority. The present master of the quarry, filling this one large contract, was all he would be.

Some day they would carry her slowly over to the little plain dotted with white gravestones. Who, beside Ruth, would reign here? Ruth, who was slipping out of the stately girlhood in which she had enthroned her, coming to have troubled lines in her face, and grave, questioning looks in her eyes.

A light wagon came spinning up the gravelled road, and she recognized the figure of Victor Hurst, so she straightened herself up stifly, smoothed the mane of white hair, and settled her mouth to its grimmest aspect.

The old servant announced him as if he were quite a stranger.

"Well, lad," with a brief, cold nod, "what's wrong at the

quarry again? For one may never hope to see you of a morning unless there is trouble."

"It is not that, however," bowing, and taking her hand with a peculiar deference that made her always think of the knightly men in her girlhood's romances.

She would give him no farther encouragement. If he had come upon his own business, he must open the way. She had heard not an hour ago that John Hurst was as well as usual, so it could not be sickness.

"I am glad to find you alone," he began, rather hurridly. "An incident occurred to me on Monday that has perplexed me not a little."

"You have taken two days to consider it, it seems;" rather tartly, folding and refolding the paper in her hand, a sign that she was not in the serenest humor.

"Yes," in no wise disconcerted by her words or manner. "And not being able to solve it, I come to you. I think once you said there was a doubt whether Sylvia Redmond's father was really dead?"

"And what have you to do with Sylvia Redmond's father? It can be nothing to you whether he is dead or alive."

"It *is* something, however," in a grave tone.

"He is dead, of course. The only sensible thing the man ever did was to die when his wife tired of him, which certainly *was* the truth. Such vows are not made for better, for worse, it appears."

Victor looked a little uncertain. Janet McRae was clearly not in an amiable mood.

"On Monday I found a poor man not far from my door, ill and very much exhausted. Nearly a fortnight before he had been at the quarry, asking the most direct route to St. Albans; and recognizing him, I gave him shelter. The next day he seemed very weakly, but yesterday he attempted to continue his journey. He was taken worse only a few rods from the house, and last night we thought him dying."

"What right have you to be receiving tramps in that fashion, Victor Hurst?"

"The divine right of every one to shelter the sick and homeless. He is feeble, and wandering in his mind, so I hardly dared believe—"

"He doesn't claim to be James Redmond?"

Mrs. McRae started as if she had received the shock of a galvanic battery.

"Yes—" hesitatingly. "It almost appears as if he must have seen Mrs. Redmond lately."

"The poor, neglected old man! Perhaps they have thrown him off. I think it would be like Margaret Redmond, now that she is about to marry her daughter so grandly. A miserable, whining sham and parasite! I must see this man."

Her voice was almost shrill in its earnestness.

"Yes, I came for you. I thought you could tell—"

"I should know James Redmond. A weak, maundering fellow; one of your sickly fine gentlemen, whose very fingers shrink from contact with anything common or useful. Why, Jacob out there, spading, has been of twice the service. Yes, I will go. I am glad you came, though you roused the old lioness in no gentle mood, I assure you."

Victor smiled. Something in his quiet smile always disarmed her.

She hurried on her bonnet and mantle, and he handed her into the wagon.

"Tell me the particulars of this strange case," she said, as soon as they were started.

Victor related them more at length. She listened with curious avidity, half-angry lights coming and going in her strong, clear eyes.

"If it is true that they have turned him away to die among strangers, they shall rue it; mind that, Victor Hurst! I could forgive any crime more readily."

He drove rapidly, and they soon reached the little cottage,

where Hester was mopping the steps. Janet McRae picked up her skirts and strode along impatiently.

"I carried him up-stairs," Victor said, "so that he should not disturb my father."

She followed him to the room, so clean, so cool, and peaceful that it seemed as if a soul might go straight from thence to heaven. Anah Hurst was watching.

You could see at a glance that the dying man had been a gentleman, if outward signs proved anything. The high, scholarly forehead; the fine, pale skin, transparent now; the aristocratic contour of the features; the slender fingers, with their long, thin nails. And yet there was about the man a curious mental weakness, as if, when the rude waves of life washed against him, he could not buffet them back. A helpless, useless, wasted soul, always weakly striving, always unsuccessful.

Janet McRae studied the face sharply. As if he felt a new presence, he opened his eyes with a frightened, entreating glance. Victor held his breath. Did he want Sylvia Redmond convicted of any monstrous sin?

"James Redmond!" in her clear, breezy voice. "Look at me well—an old friend—do you know me?"

The feeble mind seemed to flutter in the weak eyes as he made an effort, guided by the voice; for he listened after the sound had ceased.

"There was some one—" speaking slowly and with great difficulty—"Cragness, I think. If Rachel—it is Janet McRae."

She turned toward Victor.

"The man told the truth, you see."

He went maundering on much as he had through the night. Now and then he cried out for Sylvia, or begged Margaret to be pitiful.

"Only let me see her once. I will not speak—I will not call her child. My darling little Sylvia. Ah, how lovely her golden curls used to be!"

Janet McRae listened to the feeble plaints for some time, considering in her mind, not the wisest step, but the one that would have in it the truest justice. Perhaps, too, her straightforward mind was a little warped by its own strength.

"I sent over to the village for a physician," Victor said. "If Trewartha—"

She shook her head. "It is too late for human skill, still, that was proper." Then after a pause—"I shall go to St. Albans myself. Surely Margaret Redmond and her daughter can leave their gaieties for a few hours and take their rightful place. No, you need not attend me. I will drive your horse home and send him back by one of the servants."

With that Janet McRae started. Give her a duty to any human creature, especially if there was a chance for dispensing what she called justice, and she would have gone to the world's end.

Victor went down to the quarry afterward, but soon returned, It was such a strange, restless day. Sylvia, whom he had only seen by brief glimpses for the past two months, coming to this house again. In his eyes she appeared, verily and truly, Eustace Gilliat's wife. Whether there was anything to regret, whether he would have hindered if he could, were unanswerable questions. Yet it seemed as if something new and strange stirred within his heart, an emotion which he could not analyze or fathom.

Janet McRae went straight about her business as any Nemesis. The ponies trotted with long graceful sweeps, but she gave them no encouraging chirrup. The slopes of the undulating mountain-side began to hang out flaming autumn signals to entrap idle wayfarers, but she heeded them not. In her mind she was preparing Margaret Redmond a scathing sermon.

"Mrs. Redmond will not be home until evening," the servant said, eyeing the majestic old woman with the utmost astonishment. "But Miss Redmond—"

"Tell her that Mrs. McRae, of Cragness, wishes to see her;" with an imperious wave of the hand.

Sylvia started from her reverie. She had not been included in the party, for two very good reasons. Eustace had voted it a bore and a nuisance, and would not go; so she made the most of her headache, taking her toast and tea in her own room. Mrs. Redmond had not chosen to confess that she did not care to have her daughter *de trop*, since her escort was to be an old admirer of her youth, Mr. Milnor.

First Sylvia had indulged in a long passionate fit of weeping. She was so very miserable in these days. The net closed tighter about her every hour. Every wild dream of freedom had been baffled. It seemed to her that coldness, pettishness, and absolute ill-temper, attracted instead of repelling Eustace Gilliat, and Mrs. Gilliat came to have a strange, clinging love for her, that grew stronger day by day. Neither mother nor son dreamed of her secret dissatisfaction. It appeared as if they had both been stricken by some fatal blindness.

If her own mother suspected it, she too was wary. Entrenched in her own complacency and pride, Mrs. Gilliat was hardly likely to suppose this girl, who had now and then been her son's playmate, could have the slightest objection to a marriage that would prove so fortunate for her in a worldly point of view. But Mrs. Redmond found Sylvia's beliefs and opinions quite heretical, and used all her sophistries to conquer them.

"I should not have allowed her to visit those foolish old women, the Braisteds, for between them and Mrs. McRae they have filled the child's head full of nonsense."

So she labored zealously to eradicate it, refusing all requests for even the briefest visits to that dangerous vicinity, and at last becoming so harassed and nervous that Sylvia's soul was moved to a strange pity.

"It was some losses," Mrs. Redmond confessed, "I can never be thankful enough, Sylvia, that you are to marry so well.

It was so thoughtful in Mrs. Gilliat to propose our going directly to Rothermel. I wish we were there now."

But Sylvia did not. Entering those gates was setting the seal of slavery upon her very soul. Could no one see her misery? For herself, she knew that she was growing haggard with the weight of this burden, that her eyes were sunken and heavy, her spirits dull, her step languid.

After her tears Sylvia felt stronger calmer. Could she bind her soul by this base chain, in which the spirit had no correspondence; bow to fetters that she must loathe and struggle against to the death? A thousand times no, said revolting nature.

And yet she knew just such tempests, just such resolves, had been succeeded by apathetical endurance. Would it be so always, to the bitter end? Would God open no door of escape, because she had so weakly sold her woman's birthright?

She had requested that Mrs. McRae might be sent up to her room. But when she saw that tall, rigid figure, with the stern, unpitying face, her heart died within her, and a new terror shook her wrought nerves and quivering frame. Timidly she came forward, and held out her hand; but something in both face and figure touched her visitor strangely. Not the girlish Sylvia of three months ago, or of any time that she had ever known.

"I am the bearer of unwelcome news, doubtless, Miss Redmond," and the voice was chilling. "I regret very much that your mother is away. Your father is at Cragness, dying."

"My father!" She looked at Mrs. McRae sharply, to see if she were in full possession of her senses. "My father!" with an incredulous little laugh that was hard and strained. "Why, you know he died long ago!"

"He is not dead," with a kind of stiff, hard resentment. "That was the story—on what grounds I do not know. This very morning I saw him, and he recognized me. Victor Hurst found him by the road-side, like a common pauper, and gave him shelter."

Uttering this in her keenest tone, she glanced Sylvia over. The soft silk morning dress; the delicate laces, rumpled but still beautiful; the diamond shining on her finger; the earrings and brooch of pearl that suited so well her lovely complexion, and she was glad she had stung her with that one word, "pauper!"

"Papa! Are you quite sure?" in a slow, dazed way.

"Am I sure?"

The ponderous jaw seemed to bite off the word in indignation.

Then Sylvia was kneeling at her feet, crying with a kind of hysteric passion—

"Oh, Mrs. McRae, take me to him! Poor papa, whom we have thought dead so long, so long! He used to love me so dearly, and call me his little Sylvia, and hold me on his knee. Oh, *is* it true? You are not mistaken?"

The eyes were wide open with feverish light, and the dry lips quivered piteously.

"Then you did not know—"

"Know! How should I? Why did he not come here? Oh papa, poor, friendless, and dying!" and a sob choked her voice.

"Child," Janet McRae said, softening, "get yourself ready, and let us go. We have not a moment to lose."

Sylvia changed her dress, and smoothed her soft shining hair. Her temples throbbed, for the old ache had returned, and every nerve in her body felt strained at the shock, though she could hardly credit the tidings. But to go away under Janet McRae's strong wing almost promised liberty. Ah, little did she guess how it was to come.

"I must write a note for mamma. I think they will bring her over immediately, if she is not too tired."

Mrs. McRae's lips curled. Might there not be something besides fatigue?

Sylvia was ready presently. She slipped her hot, throbbing, ungloved hand within the one so cool and calm, whose life had

been like a broad, placid river. An infinite pity stole into the great stern heart for this poor little girl, with all her hideously brilliant prospects. Oh, how could a mother thus sacrifice her child, wed her to a base, unprincipled profligate? for already there had been more than one wild story afloat concerning Eustace Gilliat. But it was the way of the world. Truth, unstained honor, and manhood counted for nothing against gold, and having that, vice was glossed over.

When Mrs. McRae's first heat of prejudice began to subside she scanned Sylvia's face more narrowly—perhaps to find the traces of vanity and self-love that could feed upon this glittering prospect.

The smooth outline of pink and pearly flesh was worn and sharpened a little; the careless girl's mouth, with its brilliant smiles and small petulancies, had been shaped into something noble, tender, and patient. No one but herself would ever know the pains that had cultured it to a finer heritage than mere physical beauty, a positive strength quite capable of exerting itself in any great strait, yet veiled and tempered by some sad knowledge that had dawned too soon over this young soul. And in the drooping eyes there was strange dreariness, as if she had sounded the hollowness of the rocks whereon she expected to place her feet, and found that some black, dangerous current swept through the interstices beneath. And then the great sympathetic heart warmed to her, as it had used to the little child she held upon her knee.

"They shall not blight her whole life," she mused inwardly. "She is better and finer than I thought. Some drops of gold have mingled with the weak white clay her parents had to give her."

"Tell me about—papa," Sylvia said presently, in a broken voice.

"There is not much, my dear," and the tone softened unconsciously. "I saw him for a mere half-hour. But you shall have that little."

"Victor Hurst was very kind," after the story had ended. "Poor, poor papa! You do not think he could have come to St. Albans?"

Even as she spoke a conscious shiver sped through her pulses. She had learned so much of her mother's petty weakness, false pride, and numerous little subterfuges that were hardly truth. And if she had believed it would interfere with her social standing, or the luxuries she deemed so essential to her well-being—ah, she was her mother still, and it was cruel so to judge her.

"It is very probable, my dear;" in a dry, hard tone. *She* could not excuse Margaret Redmond's weak, narrow, pleasure-loving nature.

There was no word spoken after that. The ponies were flecked with foam long ere they reached the quarry and saw the old watch-tower of Cragness standing on its hill, with the higher one behind keeping guard in its purple-gray afternoon haze.

Mrs. Hurst came out to meet them. She took Sylvia in her arms and kissed the tired face. Motherly caresses came so natural to this woman.

"You must rest a little," she said, in her cooing, persuasive voice. "Here is a plate of peaches and cream, it will refresh you."

She took off Sylvia's hat, brought a napkin wet in fresh lavender water, and softly wiped the heat and dust from the fevered skin. Here was a cluster of Malmaison roses in a tall, slender vase, and a spray or two of heliotrope diffusing its pungent odor. If Sylvia dared but lay her head on this tender bosom and cry noiselessly until the bitter ache in her heart was washed away!

"Now take me to *him*, please."

She passed Victor in the hall. At the door Mrs. Hurst drew back.

"Come," Sylvia entreated. "I think you will pity, judge

mercifully. All these careless years I have thought him dead, you know;" as if to justify her past volatile girlhood.

She went up to the bed with a strange awe. She had never seen anything so wan and weak, so pinched and sunken. It was as if you might read a story of genteel hunger, privation, and loneliness in every line of the face. The lips had shrunken to a mere thread.

He was dozing and dreaming, but the respirations were so short and feeble, the greenish pallor so marked.

"Let me see her only once, Margaret!" the gasping voice murmured faintly. "My little Sylvia! If I could have one kiss from her fresh young lips—I might give her up to this lover, who is not worthy of her, Margaret, not worthy!"

"Papa!" The voice was curiously steady, for in that brief instant she had decided her fate anew. Did God demand that she should wreck her own soul for another's bodily comfort and satisfaction?

"Papa, I am here,—little Sylvia!"

She bowed until her soft curls brushed against his cheek. She kissed the cold lips, took the wasted hands in hers.

A quiver ran through his frame with the power and agony of a mortal spasm. He glanced wildly at her and rolled his head feebly upon the pillow.

"No, it is not Sylvia. Margaret, you deceive me. Sylvia has gone with her young lover."

"I could not always remain little as when I sat upon your knee and pulled your soft beard about, or listened to stories of beautiful brave queens, of kings and knights and crusaders. But I remember the long evenings at cousin Braisted's, when mamma would be ill upon the sofa, and we sat and studied the fire, built castles and palaces and flame-pictures such as no artist ever painted. Look at me, dear. It is the child grown into the woman, but the child's heart still aches for the empty years out of which you have fallen. Papa! Papa!"

The pathetic cry, the voice strong and sad as death itself, shook the centre of his unbelief. The eyes stared with spasmodic brightness, the hands clutched at her garments.

"And through all these years, when I have thought of you as being at rest in heaven, I have treasured up all the old remembrances, the walks we used to take, the poems you taught me, the books we read together. Ah, why did you not come sooner? Why did you linger desolate and forlorn, when your child's heart would have been full of tender love for you."

She buried her face in the pillow and sobbed softly. Ah, it was well that she was never to know the sufferings of those years. The long illness in a hospital, from whence had come the rumor of his death; his hesitation to announce himself when he found that his wife had been received into her father's house; his weak ambition to do something that would give him the success other men gained; the struggles, the defeats, the drear nights in miserable attics, trying to extract from his confused and wandering brain brilliant ideas that never even came; days when he had hovered at the doors and gratings of restaurants for a little warmth and savory odor to appease his hunger. A poor, weak, but proud and honorable gentleman, pushed to the wall by the stronger ones. Perhaps a true woman's love might have imparted stamina, encouraged and brightened; but when Margaret Redmond came to the dregs of poverty, she could do nothing but bemoan her own sad fate.

He touched the soft cheek with his finger, that shook like a stray leaf in a November blast, caught feebly at the floating curls, and then smiled.

"Yes, it is Sylvia!"

She uttered a wild little cry, for she thought him dying. Mrs. Hurst came and bathed the pallid face, and chafed the cold hands.

"Don't leave me!" he entreated, pitifully, grasping at the air.

"No, I shall not. Dear, dear papa!"

Afterward he dozed again. The room began to be shrouded in twilight, and when Mrs. Hurst brought in a lamp she begged her to leave it on the hall-table. She sat on the bed's side now, talking sweet and slow, and listening to the broken sentences, kissing the wrinkled cheek, the straggling hair, and the cold hands that began to grow mysteriously useless. All the vehement child's love came back to her. She had never been ashamed of him in those old days, for there was no pride to be stung by unsuccess. And now that he was dying, the chivalrous girl's heart, so much finer and nobler than any of them had dreamed, would have covered sins as well as mistakes and failures, and kissed down the fluttering eyelids that none might see their secret.

The frail life floated on and on. Trewartha came and looked at him and whispered softly—"At midnight." Janet McRae wandered up and down as if held by some curious spell; but Anah Hurst was strangly sweet and tranquil.

Sometime after the night had set in, and fitful gusts were blowing blue-black drifts about the pale moon-tinted sky, they heard a sound of furious driving that stopped at the door, and then a rather thick, imperious voice demanding "Miss Redmond."

Sylvia shivered with mental anguish and shame

Presently Victor came up-stairs.

"Your mother is ill," he said, "and in great alarm. She has sent for you."

Sylvia Redmond straightened her slight figure, though her face was deathly white. But her tone was clear and untrembling.

"Tell Eustace Gilliat that my place is here, at my father's side, until God frees me. Even if it were otherwise, I could not return with him to-night."

Victor remarked the convulsive shiver. Ah, how could she have given that despicable creature any power over her?

"But your mother?"

"Mamma will understand. I think I am right;" with slow hesitation, glancing into his eyes.

"You are right." He could not help but utter the words, for if she had been willing he must have kept her from the questionable journey.

"Ask him to take my love and sympathy to mamma. She has kind friends, and *he* needs me."

Anah Hurst had been standing ghostly white since the name dropped from her son's lips. Now she came close to Sylvia, and said in a faint, hollow tone—

"There was a Kirke Gilliat I once heard of;" her hand going over her eyes with the long unused gesture.

"It is his son;" with a shiver.

"You are to marry him—"

"Oh, can I?" crowding down a gasping, hysterical breath. "Mrs. Gilliat is mamma's friend: they will both be kind to her in this trouble, I think. But it might be a disgrace in their eyes. They are very proud."

Anah kissed her with sudden fervor, then went to the window. The voices below made her heart stand still with fear. Was it Kirke Gilliat's son uttering those angry oaths to *her* child?

Presently the horses moved on, and the clump of maples between broke the sound. The old clock in the corner began to strike slowly, but before it had told off its count of nine, a sharp, ringing thrill pierced the air, stunning them all with mortal terror.

After that a long, awesome silence. Five minutes, perhaps, elapsed before Victor Hurst entered; but to them it appeared half a lifetime. His face was flushed and the lips firmly set; but he was unharmed. That brought them a great feeling of relief, yet no one asked a question.

"The hand of Kirke Gilliat's son raised against *him*," Anah Hurst thought, with a sickening shiver.

CHAPTER XXV.

The quarrel had been bitter enough on the one side. Eustace Gilliat affected to believe the tidings that called Sylvia thither, a mere ruse. He had come in after a day's hunting dissipation, rather the worse for the champagne and brandy that had washed down the dinner. Mrs. Redmond, in hysterics, making strange of the intelligence, bewailing, calling upon Sylvia, and denouncing Mrs. McRae, fired the weak and over-heated brain into ill-judged championship. More than all, Sylvia was among the Hursts.

If he had felt certain of her regard for him, he would doubtless have waited until morning. But his jealous passion, his rights that had been so disregarded, and grudging hatred for the old blow, was strong upon him. And was he not shortly to be Sylvia's master? As well give her a lesson in obedience and consideration now.

So he summoned Jules, who would fain have dissuaded him; but in such a mood as this, Eustace Gilliat was incapable of reasoning. Mrs. Gilliat was too much occupied with her friend to understand the true import of her son's resolve.

Victor went out to the road to learn who these late visitors might be, and was met by a sudden and peremptory demand for Miss Redmond.

"Her father is dying," he answered. "If it is necessary, Mrs. McRae will bring her back in the morning; but she would hardly go to-night."

Eustace Gilliat answered this by an offensive assumption of authority that brought Victor's blood to a white heat. And as he leaned out of the carriage, his breath still hot with the

liquor rioting in his brain, Victor could have crushed him in the dust like any unclean thing. This man to marry Sylvia Redmond! Why, he was a hundred times more loathsome and disgusting than the boy at Bohmerwald.

"She will not go," he said, firmly. "Her friends would be wild to allow it. Why, you cannot reach St. Albans before midnight."

"Sylvia Redmond is answerable to no one save her mother and myself. Will you take my message, or shall I?"

Victor understood which way would be the best, and he could almost hear Sylvia's answer before she had uttered it. He brought back the refusal courteously.

Eustace Gilliat was fearfully enraged. In another moment he would have leaped from the carriage. Victor held him in with a strong arm.

"Listen," he began calmly. "Yonder house is mine; and you shall not step across its threshold to-night. I should as soon think of thrusting Sylvia Redmond to the edge of some dangerous precipice as to hand her over to your care. Her father is dying—no imposter, though you may choose to think so. Go peaceably away, and to-morrow assert your authority, if you have any."

As he spoke he caught the leader's rein and ran down the road like a flash. Neither Sylvia's ears nor his mother's should be wounded by this drunken braggadocio.

"Now," he continued, "go your way. If you have any sense, any natural feeling, you must know that a death-bed of all other places should be held sacred from intrusion."

There was a rift of moonlight creeping through the cloud's ragged edge. Eustace Gilliat snatched the whip from its socket, but before he could strike, a strong hand had wrenched the weapon from him, and a stinging laugh smote his ear.

"It is useless to try the strength of arm or brain with me, Eustace Gilliat, as you might have known," he said, scornfully. "Go your way in peace."

For an instant the man, in his helpless, impotent wrath, knew not what to do.

"You love *her*," he hissed. "Ah, I have guessed that secret between you, and why she came at a word, on this weak excuse. Filial love! ha! ha! But I want to tell you that she shall be *my* wife in the face of man or devil. If she hated me, I should still marry her. If her father is proven a vagabond or criminal, that will not stand in my way. I have not forgotten that old night, and the blow you gave me. I can strike you back now. If it were ten years instead of two, I should remember it, and be revenged."

Something seemed to stifle heart and brain. Victor caught at a breath of wandering air, as if it had been his salvation. Sylvia Redmond this man's wife! Her pure, sweet girlhood mated to this base, vile, unclean being! Was this the high station that he had once almost envied?

"Ah, that stings you, does it?" thus translating his silence. "I shall bring down her haughty pride as well; she wears a diamond now, my fetter, and I shall load her with others, that may glitter in the world's sight, but be the chain of a galley-slave to her, if she ventures to rebel. And if you dare to cross her path—"

"I have no desire," in a strong, cold voice. "Leave her to-night in peace; it is all I ask."

He turned the horse again, and nodded to the driver. Jules felt that his master's anger rendered him indiscreet, and that it would be wiser to put an end to the parleying.

Victor made a sudden plunge in the group of trees as the horses started. The darkness seemed to drop at that moment, as if the whole heavens were obscured. And then a sound that caused him to shiver, to start and see if he were unharmed.

"A coward's revenge," he muttered, but he entered the house with a startled face. In the midst of the awesome silence the bell in his father's room summoned assistance or favor from some one, and he left them without an explanation.

At midnight, as Trewartha had said, the poor stranded soul was loosed from the shoals among which it had floated, and passed out to the broad ocean, its futile efforts ended. Very peacefully, as if at rest, and glad to lay down the burden. On the other side, God took it into account, knowing the weakness and frustrated hopes better than any human eye.

Mrs. McRae almost carried the unresisting Sylvia down stairs in her arms, and laid her on the sofa. The wide open eyes were tearless, and all the bright color had faded from the lips. It was partly terror, for the mystery and fearful power of death, witnessed for the first time, chills young blood. But something deeper still was stirring in her soul. Somewhere this poor, pale life had gone astray. The moment when it lost the clue, when it ceased to be what God had meant, and went drifting round in vague, purposeless confusion, its downfall began. She could see now where hers would be wrecked. As Mrs. Gilliat's nurse and companion, there might be use and work for her; but as Eustace Gilliat's wife—

She drew her breath hard and quick, raising her head.

"What is it, child? Are you never going to sleep?"

The tone was not untender. She slipped to the floor and laid her head in Mrs. McRae's lap.

"Dear Mrs. McRae," she said; "if any one took a weak step unwittingly, or was wrongly persuaded in any vital matter, and came to know the truth afterward, would it not be right for —this person to go back, no matter what might be the pain or shame?"

"I think it would," slowly, as if she were considering.

"It is about my engagement. I would like to tell you. I have had no—no—friend;" stumbling a little.

"Yes, child," tenderly smoothing the fair cheek.

It was a comfort to go over the story, to have her doubts solved, and her brooding fears dispelled.

"For now that I have seen the end of mamma's ill-judged marriage, I cannot go on. She must have loved papa in the

beginning; and though I used to have a childish admiration for Eustace Gilliat, it was because I fancied he would make a gracious gentleman, like his father. He never will be."

"No. Virtues are not always hereditary, my dear, and vices are often frightfully exaggerated. The follies of the whole race seem to culminate in him, for I dare say there were some questionable ancestors. If we could come down in a straight line of virtue, we should be as gods;" with a short, grim laugh. "I suppose the Master of all means that we shall have some fighting to do."

"And I must fight hard for freedom. It was my weakness that led me astray."

Mrs. Collins, a superannuated nurse, had come over at Hester's bidding, and the two women were busy up-stairs. Victor had gone quietly to his room, exchanging no word with any one. The thought of Sylvia's future rent his soul. There seemed to flash into existence another part of his being, hitherto unshared, unknown. A deep, awful power, magnetized by its own capacity for joy or bliss, and held in breathless thrall as if awaiting its hour of deliverance. His intuitions became refined, penetrating, able to translate this faint throb of mystery, and yet some shadow with its cold hand held him back. For if she knew all, what then? He was not like other men, with this black fate at his back.

No one slept through the night. The morning dawned dull and chilling, with a fine mist in the air. Breakfast was late, and just after they had been summoned, Trewartha walked in unceremoniously, his hair tumbled, his face flushed with some under-current of perplexity.

After a word to the others he went over to the window and spoke in a low tone to Victor.

"Gilliat was here last night. You and he had a quarrel?"

"He had been drinking, and was violent, as well as abusive. Only a madman would have trusted Sylvia with him, had she been willing to go. She refused, and I would not allow him

to enter the house. His man was the more sensible of the two."

"And then—?"

Trewartha transfixed him with the strange meaning of his eye.

Victor gave a nervous, embarrassed laugh.

"I am alive, you see, so let it go," he answered.

"But it cannot," in a tone of irritation. "I may as well tell you—if you do not know—Eustace Gilliat was shot last night, just as he parted from you, and died at daylight this morning."

"My God!" and Victor clasped his hand to his forehead.

The three women heard this, and joined them in breathless terror.

"I am an idiot," declared Trewartha. "Explain this mystery, some of you. You must have heard the report."

Mrs. Hurst came close to her son, and took his hand as if she feared to see the stain.

"Eustace Gilliat!" she repeated, in a strange, sinking voice, the lips flickering as if some torture had been suddenly applied that scorched the fine nerves.

Looking into her wild eyes he read her secret.

"It is clean;" hoarsely, grasping her fingers within his, until she could have cried with the pain. "Clean!" holding it up. "Before God, and you all, I am guiltless of any man's blood." But he knew in his soul that it was a brother's.

"Dead! Eustace Gilliat!" Sylvia had received her freedom.

"Had you known him before? Was there an old quarrel?"

"I met him more than two years ago. There was a harvest festival at a Bohemian settlement below Weareham. The quarrel was not much. He insulted a girl, held her captive, and I rescued her with a blow. That was all."

"Did you hear the report of the pistol? Surely you must have?"

The question was addressed to all, but no one replied.

Then Janet McRae stepped forward. "If we could save Victor Hurst's life by a lie," she said, in her clear strong tone, "he would hardly accept. We all heard. He did not enter the house until some minutes afterward."

All this time she was studying him with an awful, undefined fear. He had hot blood in his veins, and a fiery temper.

"I can't tell," he said, with a perplexed air. "I thought it was meant for me, and that *he* had fired. But good heavens! To die like the beasts of the field!"

"A reptile rather, who leaves his venom behind. They, or rather his man, drove swiftly to Greaves, it seems. An artery had been severed and internal hemorrhage set in. They came for me at once, though nothing could have saved him. But he lived to make a deposition and sign it; and his man attests every word. There was a grudging hate in him. I think he hardly felt the pain of dying, because he could revenge himself. And now what is to be done?"

In that moment of pain and terror Anah Hurst would have counselled flight. If they two were only free! Ah, why had she induced him to come to Cragness?

"Is there a pistol in the house?"

"I never owned one," Victor replied.

"There is some strange mystery at the bottom of all this. The man, Jules Duconge, swears they were both unarmed. A keen, daring enemy must have done it. If you could prove—"

"I can prove nothing," impatiently. "I was near there, almost within range. The shot was fired after I had turned. But I think you must all believe me innocent of so terrible a crime;" and a shiver ran through his frame.

"There will be a warrant out presently. If I have blundered in my telling, forgive. I could not bear the suspense, and it would not be pleasant tidings from a stranger. An inquest, I suppose, will he held immediately."

It seemed to Victor Hurst that some unseen blow had stunned him utterly. He did not dare glance at his mother

again, crushed and speechless by the weight of this misery. And even now it appeared to him as if the shot must have been given from the carriage, though human passion could hardly go that far for revenge.

A strange morning, with the dead man in the house, and this nameless terror hanging over their heads. Sylvia forgot her own grief, her sense of freedom, even her mother.

Once she came over to Victor.

"You remembered the night at Bohmerwald," she said, with a poignant pain in her voice; "and *him*," tremulously. "You forgot only me."

"No," looking past her, yet with some peculiar second sight reading the droop of the eyes and the quiver of the lips, and hearing Eustace Gilliat's words again. "But I am glad now that you never spoke. It could have made no difference."

"The quarrel was about me. I know he was miserably jealous. If I should have cost you something dearer than life—"

"No, no. There is some fearful mistake. Or, is it all blind chance for a man to fight against? Why did fate bring us all together then, to work out this awful tragedy at the last?"

There was an expression in her face that arrested his attention. A burden deeper than present pain, a haunting sense of loss and despair. Was it for Eustace Gilliat?

"Forgive me." His tone was very low. "I forgot your anguish. Good God! Why can we not all go back?"

"You mistake me," she returned, falteringly. "Last night I resolved, come what would, to break the bond between myself and Eustace Gilliat. It was—forced upon me—and I proved too weak for the higher path of duty. But I think I should have found it at last."

Her eyes were downcast, her face very pale, and her whole figure trembling. A great throb of relief sped through his veins. This could not bring them any nearer together, but it redeemed her in his estimation to know that

she could not love that shallow, selfish man, and would have been in the end too true to holiest womanhood to give herself for his gold, or his proud lineage.

"Do not fear for me."

But even as he spoke, a tramp of feet and an authoritative knock were heard. How could they see him taken away like a common criminal? Sylvia hid her face and sobbed, though her eyes were tearless.

"I am innocent, let that comfort you," he said, preparing to follow.

As if links must multiply, a pistol was found not far from the spot, and carried off in triumph. Yet Trewartha's strong courage cheered them all. He was to make the explanation to John Hurst.

"It will not do to tell him the truth," he said; so he laid stress upon important business.

"But he did not even look in to say good-bye," was the grieved response.

"The summons was sudden and imperative. I will be your son meanwhile. Command me," and he smiled with a poor attempt at his usual geniality.

Anah Hurst was stunned. That God would right the terrible mistake she could scarcely doubt. Victor would soon return, cleared of the foul imputation. But that he should have been brought face to face with Eustace Gilliat!

She dragged herself up-stairs, where Sylvia was lying tearless and sleepless.

"Oh, don't hate me," the poor girl moaned, covering her face with her hands. "That I should have brought all this trouble upon you, when you had already been so kind to—poor papa!" the pale lips quivering as she spoke.

"Child," in a calm, peculiar manner, "I think it is some subtle fate working itself out. The sins of the fathers are to be visited upon the children; but it seems cruel when the poor children are innocent. It is a great, unfathomable mystery."

"*He* is guiltless," Sylvia cried, sharply.

"Yes. Well, I am his mother."

"Does any one doubt it?" thinking only of the crime, her wild, feverish eyes searching the cold, pale face.

"But it is not that I came to ask you," pressing her hand against her forehead with a shiver, as if there was some strong repulsion in the subject. "You have known *them*," [she could not utter the name,] "a long while?"

"Yes. Mamma and Mrs. Gilliat are old friends."

"Tell me about them!"

She turned her face away and shaded her eyes, but her respiration was slow and labored.

"About—Rothermel?"

"The three—the household."

So Sylvia began. The past years had a charm for her, which no present, however terrible, could quite obliterate. The house lay always in her mind as a stately and beautiful picture, with its background of knights and heroes and handsome women. Mrs. Gilliat, with all her haughtiness and indifference, had petted Sylvia, and endeared herself in many ways to the girlish heart.

"And—the son?"

The child shuddered.

"You were to marry him. It is strange, but I never heard of it until last night. I have lived so quietly."

Victor had not spoken of it then. Of course, it could make no difference to him whom she married.

"Yes, I *was* to marry him; though, I think, I never could have done it," in a voice freighted with the strength of desperation. "I liked him as a boy, that is—why, I was nothing but a child, you know; a weak, vain, silly child, thinking myself so wise, yet fearfully ignorant. And as no one else cared for me,—as I could not tell then how much a woman's soul might be to her own very self, I let them all persuade me into it. Do not believe that it was for the wealth or station—why—" hysteric-

ally—"yesterday, I fancied I could be happy with papa alone, if I had to work or beg for the bread we ate. I began to learn, then, the full strength of a woman's love, and what a clean, pure life would be to her. He was small of soul, narrow, scoffing at virtue and generous impulses; and when I came to realize his vices—no, I could never have gone on—even for his mother's sake;" with an irrepressible shiver.

Anah Hurst reached over and took the child in her arms. The two seemed to be brought together by common suffering. The father's hand had stabbed her, and the son's might have wrought a still deeper desolation in Sylvia's life.

She had it all very clearly before her now. By some turn of fate she had been kept in ignorance of their near vicinity, and perhaps it was well, seeing that she was bound hand and foot and could not stir without telling her story. But why had God tangled all their lives together to culminate in this fearful tragedy? blood arrayed against blood. She remembered the passionate hatred Victor had expressed against Kirke Gilliat on the night when he first heard the story. But now he had grown calmer and clearer of brain.

A strange, awesome day indeed! Doctor Trewartha went to St. Albans and brought from thence a report. Mrs. Redmond was really ill and bitterly incensed against her child. Mrs. Gilliat had been in strong convulsions since the sad tidings, and lay at the point of death.

"There must be some arrangements made for the funeral," Mrs. McRae said, taking Trewartha into the deserted sitting-room. "Rachel Braisted has been over, and proposes that the body shall be brought there. They are very kind and sympathizing. I think they feel that Margaret Redmond hardly did her duty by her husband."

"She must have believed him dead, at first."

"So far as I can put his incoherent story together, he never made his existence known until latterly. If he went to St. Albans, I can fancy her dread and mortification. Perhaps she

felt that he had forfeited all claim upon her. We will not judge too harshly now. I am glad to know that Sylvia can begin her life afresh."

Trewartha looked surprised at this mercy where he had expected strict justice and condemnation.

"Have you seen—the young man's father?"

"Yes. I may as well confess—that Mr. Gilliat feels terribly bitter. It was his only child. From all I hear, the youth could hardly have died at a better time." A slight expression of contempt crossed Trewartha's face. "But I would give half my fortune, or *all*, that it had not occurred."

"You apprehend no danger to—Victor? He *must* be acquitted!" she exclaimed, with her old vehemence.

"Circumstances multiply. Gilliat was shot from the left side, at which Victor stood, so there can be *no* hypothesis of accident. His man declares that Victor had barely time to turn. The pistol was found out yonder."

"Yes!" She was studying Trewartha's anxious face intently.

"Is there some subtle demon at the bottom of it all? The pistol has a small silver plate on which is engraved an 'H.'"

"My God! But you don't believe—" and her strong features trembled in ashen dullness.

"Until Victor Hurst confesses the deed I shall hold him innocent."

"Thank God!" grasping his arm with eager, desperate passion; "for I have come to love the lad in spite of his cold, unsocial ways. And I *know* he could never have done it."

"But everything will go against him. The inquest is to be held to-morrow. We shall all be called."

"Do they think that I can swear his life away?" she cried, with sharp anguish.

CHAPTER XXVI.

When Jules Duconge took the news of the murder to St. Albans, the whole house seemed horror-stricken. He told his story first to Mr. Milnor, for he hardly dared face Mr. Gilliat.

Whatever hopes Kirke Gilliat might have had for his son in by-gone days, they had perished utterly during the last few months. A dozen years like the last two abroad would bring Rothermel near to the auctioneer's hammer. He and his wife had lived elegantly, sometimes to the extent of their income, and there was not much lying back; but he had a hatred of debt. So a valuable piece of timber had gone to extricate Eustace.

There was nothing noble, generous, or refined in the lad's nature. Exterior graces and foppishness he abounded in; but the soul was unutterably indigent. His father *not* desiring to see his faults, appeared to be made all the more plainly aware of them, as sometimes when one's eyes are tightly shut, a past hideous sight will still linger.

He could never quite forget what he had given up for possible children—brave sons and beautiful daughters, not this one poor puny body, and coarse, shallow soul. Yet, now that he was dead, Kirke Gilliat beat his breast passionately. It was *all* he had. And with that, sweet, tender child, Sylvia, for wife, there might have been a nobler future. Perhaps he had been unjust—all young men went astray at times.

Half an hour afterward he sent for Milnor again.

"Let me hear the man's story," he said, with feverish haste. "There must be some horrible mistake. What had Eustace done to make so bitter an enemy?"

So Jules was called in and questioned minutely. The story lost nothing at his hands. Not that he wilfully exaggerated, but his sympathies were with his master, who in his best moods had always been lavishly indulgent. The threats on the one side were softened down, and on the other, every word and gesture remembered.

"Victor Hurst," Milnor said, thoughtfully. "I ought to know the name."

"It appears to me that you mentioned it last winter when you were staying at Rothermel—it's an unusual name, too."

"Oh, I remember some trade outbreak in one of the northern towns—and—why, it must be the young man in whom Miss Lowndes was so much interested," with an expression of surprise at his own blindness.

"That you were half-persuaded was a poor, struggling genius. But for me you would have taken him in hand. A coarse bully and ruffian."

"Perhaps—"

"There may be an excuse for some sins, but murder—brutal, wilful taking of life should be shown *no* mercy. If there is any law in the land, this man shall have his deserts. There is too much of this taking the law in one's own hands. The rabble learn only by sharp punishment."

Milnor profoundly pitied the man, reading the anguish in every line of his face. What was the stranger to him?

"The testimony must come out strong on the inquest. This fellow's past life and violence, his quarrel with my son—everything that we can find. Milnor, I depute much of this to you, my friend. Help me to remember. My brain seems almost crazed."

"Do not excite yourself so fearfully;" and Milnor laid his hands on the other's shoulder.

Gilliat bowed his head, and shook with a strong man's passionate grief.

"Let us go," he said, presently, when he could command

himself. "If they have not arrested the cowardly villain, he may escape. And poor Sylvia! Jules, go at once for Doctor Trewartha. Mrs. Gilliat is in imminent danger."

"I might drive you over, monsieur;" and the man bowed obsequiously.

"Yes. I can think of nothing. O God! what a blow!"

"Be calm," entreated Milnor, helping him to prepare for the ride.

Jules had driven directly to the village after his master's first exclamation, knowing that it was not much beyond half a mile to the office of Doctor Greaves. And now the body lay on a long table in the back consulting-room, a constable from Taunton keeping watch over it until the jury could be summoned.

From the first, as Doctor Trewartha said, the wound had been mortal. When Greaves found it so serious a matter, he had despatched Jules for Trewartha; but the wounded man's strength failing rapidly, he sent for a justice near by, afraid to have the whole weight on his hands.

Eustace Gilliat's brain was a fiery, seething mass, brought to a scarlet flame by his last draught of brandy before he left St. Albans; and this, with his outburst of anger, jealousy, and furious resentment at suddenly meeting the one who had struck him an unforgiven blow, threw him into a frantic state. At first he raved like a madman; and it was only when his strength began to fail that he could be quieted. No bitter enemy could have directed a more fatal shot. The group questioned each other with fearful eyes. A murder was so new to them that the shock went deep indeed.

They hoped at first to keep him alive until the next day; but at three he began to sink. The passionate voice fell to a mere whisper, and there came into his countenance a ghastly terror that those who saw never forgot.

But when the last faint sigh passed the colorless lips, a touch of boyish beauty came back to the still face, bringing a thought

of pure, clean childhood, before he had begun to stain his soul with a man's dissipations. And seeing him thus, the old pride and tenderness returned to his father's heart. Death had obliterated the sins and follies.

If anythnig, it made Kirke Gilliat a hundredfold more bitter. That this low wretch—for a man who had been in a trade-riot must, of necessity, be rough and vile—dared to raise his hand against the life of a fellow-creature so much higher in the social scale, stamped the sin as more foul in his estimation.

"Has the man been arrested?" he asked.

Thay gaped at one another. Arrested! Would Mrs. McRae allow such a thing.

"Constable, have a warrant gotten out immediately. My son's deposition renders it more than a suspicion. It is proof!" raising his voice.

Trewartha was amazed at the chain of evidence; but to undertake to combat it was folly.

"We can keep him here until the inquest is ended," said constable Lowther. "After that there'll be a regular commitment to Taunton jail. Shocking thing! I can't more than half believe it!"

"I will answer for him," exclaimed Trewartha, clearly. "Victor Hurst is no coward."

Kirke Gilliat's lip curled scornfully.

"You might have said yesterday that he was no murderer. But you see, you see!"

Milnor stood by thoughtfully. How little Miss Lowndes knew of this turbulent fellow. He was glad now that he had not been persuaded into taking any interest. Perhaps Gilliat was right. The crude effervescence of such rude brains could never be genius, fine and heroic.

Yet if they two had met on the day of the excursion, Eustace Gilliat might have finished his life in his own fashion. So closely are we all linked together that a word

or deed changes the destiny of men for all time, perhaps for eternity.

The stir, tumult, and excitement were so great that the inquest did not begin until mid-afternoon. Victor had been confined in the room above, a kind of hall used for a children's singing-school, and business meetings. A guard had been detailed to keep watch over him ; but he sat listlessly by the window, with the curtain nearly down. He heard the shuffling and sound of voices below, he seemed to see the dead man, and one other.

The physician's evidence was taken first. The pistol had been fitted with the ball extracted from the body. There could be no doubt but that it had produced death. Trewartha was brief, but Greaves went through with a professional diagnosis, as well as the testimony of the dying man.

After that came Jules Duconge. The case appeared hopelessly clear when they adjourned, at dusk ; but there were a number of witnesses yet to examine.

Trewartha took his way to the cottage. Janet McRae was still there. Anah Hurst, in this bitter desolation, seemed very near to her. And though she would rather have held the poor woman's hand in silence, she forced herself to go about, to cheer John Hurst, fretting for his absent son, and rouse Sylvia from her torpor.

She started at Trewartha's step, and went out to the door.

"What is it?" she asked, in a sharp, nervous whisper.

"It's not ended. But, oh Heaven ! It will be the worst, the worst !"

"No !" Her strong frame trembled like an autumn leaf.

"Yes. You will be summoned to-morrow. Somehow they have learned about the trouble at Weareham, which will be another thing to go against him. And Sylvia's testimony will be needed."

"Did you see—him ?"

"Yes. I am going back to spend the night with him. He is very quiet, with grand, steady lines in his face, but an awful

shadow, as if some sight was perpetually haunting him. But it cannot be. He is quick of temper, yet utterly incapable of such a deed."

"He is! he is! Let us believe that to the last. I never was much mistaken in any one before."

"If it had not been for that old quarrel! Why must all the deeds of a man's life be dragged up against him in an unfortunate moment? Yet there is such a strange mystery about it. I incline to the opinion that Eustace Gilliat must have had a mortal enemy dogging his steps."

He went in and spoke a few words to Mrs. Hurst, and examined Sylvia, whose eyes were feverishly bright.

"Child," he said gently, "they will need your story to-morrow. If you know anything that may ease matters for him—"

She shivered violently and seemed to shrink from the kindly clasp.

"The truth," she moaned, "the bitter, bitter truth! Oh, why does God make it so hard to tell? If we could say—"

"If he *had* come in before the shot was fired?"

"But he did not." She uttered it with the apathy of despair.

The morning dawned too soon. Sylvia did not sleep at all, but lay all night with dreary, wide-open eyes. The man she loved. She knew it now with hot flushes of pain and shame. And because she had been willing to bear about a lie on her own soul, to respond to words that found no echo in her heart, to submit her lips to kisses that were pollution,—and she rubbed her mouth vehemently with the corner of the sheet, fresh from Anah Hurst's press, fragrant with dried rose-leaves, as if she would scour off all the stain. In doing this she had jeopardized the one life that would always be most precious to her. Ah, God! what a terrible punishment!

She had thought little before of the unseen forces ebbing and flowing in her soul, to give it vital force and self-reliance.

Instead, she had been content to drift on crested waves, to dip dainty fingers in the clear streams, and shake off pearls with a laugh. It could never be so again. The whole current of her life had changed. Three months ago, a thoughtless child; to-night, a sad, strong woman.

Yet the flesh was miserably weak when she rose and dressed herself. There need be no curls this morning, no twisting of golden threads over her fingers, when one dear heart lay dead up at Cousin Braisted's, whither he had been taken, and the other was banned a criminal before the world.

Janet McRae looked in upon her. "Child!" she exclaimed, aghast, "are you well enough? For the trial will be terrible."

"Yes. And yet God never deserted any one for telling the truth."

"They were racked, they were burned at the stake, and thrown to wild beasts. It is no fable. God knows the torture is all here. Still we must be strong."

"Yes;" with her eyes on the floor, and her white fingers moving slowly over the buttons of her dress, fumbling as if they had lost their strength.

"Child, child! I don't know what makes you seem so near this morning, or so like a woman."

"Perhaps it is because I've come to the simple truth, and mean to keep there all the rest of my life. Oh, Mrs. McRae, why do they not teach us girls what a grand and solemn thing it is to live, and that we have the lives of others in our hands? If I had known it before!"

Janet McRae kissed the white, cold forehead.

"I've been praying through the night. God isn't so far off, after all. I think He will see that every one comes to his or her right."

There was a strange awesomeness in her tone.

"I don't understand," Mrs. McRae muttered, feeling that the child had gained some knowledge far beyond her eagle vision.

Trewartha came for them at ten.

"Oh," Mrs. McRae exclaimed, with a vehement burst of emotion, "how can I, how can I? I was so proud to bring him here. I meant to make his life full and happy and satisfying; then to have this dead fruit—so bitter to the taste."

"It would go against him anyhow. The little more or less cannot save him now. We shall have to fight afterward."

It seemed to Janet McRae that she had never known any trial before, during the whole of her prosperous life. Yesterday she would have passed by this rabble—she was aristocratic in her way as well—with a nod of cheerful indifference. Lowther, Carton, Doctor Greaves, and these twelve jurymen were of no special import at their daily duties; but now, when they held a life in their hands!

The examination had commenced with the finding of the pistol and its significant letter, which would be weight upon the trial even against the declaration of Victor Hurst. Then Mrs. McRae was called.

Terrible as the truth might be, she could not waver here. She had never consciously glossed over a falsehood. But her answers were most brief. She had heard the disturbance, the voice of Eustace Gilliat raised in a passion, the shot fired.

"Was it before Victor Hurst returned to the room?"

The very air about her seemed to tremble.

"It was." Oh, God! help and pity her.

"Did Victor Hurst seem in any way confused or embarrassed afterward?"

"Not to her mind. He had declared himself innocent, when he heard of the murder."

"Sylvia Redmond."

She came forward, raising her veil a trifle, and thankful that she could follow in the beaten track, not having to say these words for the first time. In this respect the evidence was merely a repetition.

"Did she know anything about the enmity between the two men? Had she heard any threats on either side?"

"I was at the Bohmerwald festival," in a low, clear tone. "Eustace Gilliat accompanied the party."

Every one turned at this.

"Did you know of any quarrel?"

"I think there was none. I have never heard Eustace Gilliat mention it."

"You saw Victor Hurst present?"

"I did. I know that no dispute of any kind occurred before the supper. Shortly afterward we returned to our hotel. The cause of the trouble, on the fatal evening, was that Mr. Gilliat desired to take me home to St. Albans; but I refused, as my father was dying. Victor Hurst had nothing to do with it, except to take my message. I could not see Mr. Gilliat then, but the fault or blame does not rightly belong to Mr. Hurst. There was nothing in the message that ought to have offended. Under different circumstances I should not have gone."

There was a sudden cooling of violent prejudice, as Sylvia Redmond took her seat. One and another felt that the cause might have been less than they at first imagined. And if Gilliat had been under the influence of liquor, as Trewartha so clearly stated!

Still, there were the overwhelming facts. A murder had been done, and what hand except Victor Hurst's could have fired the fatal shot?

A few more witnesses were called, and the jurors began to consider the case within themselves. Half an hour's discussion and their verdict was ready. There was a stillness almost as solemn as if their decision was to be the final one.

"We find that Eustace Gilliat came to his death, on the night of September tenth, by a wound from a pistol, discharged at the hands of Victor Hurst."

"Make out the necessary papers. The man must be committed for trial."

Then the solemnity was broken by stir and shuffle and the hum of voices. Trewartha came to Sylvia and pressed her cold, ungloved fingers. Although she swayed like a lily on its stem, and her face was of lily whiteness, something in her eyes told that the agony was too tense to allow of fainting.

"Oh!" with a low, wild cry that went hardly farther than his ears, "I am the cause of it all! There is nothing in my life that could make amends for his, and the bitter shame, the suffering, the pangs of his mother—"

"Hush, child. Do not make your burden heavier by fierce upbraidings. There is a strange mystery about it all. I think it *must* come right, but I don't know how."

"He is innocent!" with a feverish, passionate force. "If I could see him and tell him so."

"You can. Will it not be too much?" after a moment's pause, noting the strained hard lines about the mouth.

"No, no;" wringing her hands wearily.

The conclave broke up. It was so clear to all their minds that the final verdict was a foregone conclusion.

The prisoner would be taken to Taunton jail. "No," in answer to a question of Trewartha's, "there could be no present arrangement made concerning bail; and in a criminal case like this—where it was the life of a fellow-creature—"

"Will you see—*him?*" asked Milnor, a faint curiosity stirring his own languid nerves.

"See—him?" and Kirke Gilliat turned with an expression of disgust on his handsome, worldly face. "No, I have no morbid desire to gaze at a low, vile criminal, whose hands are stained with blood—and the blood that of my own child. Let us get out of this crowd. The very air stifles me."

He could not even go over there and speak to Sylvia Redmond. She, too, had sunk in his estimation, since it was plain her bias was in favor of the prisoner—a coarse, restless, turbulent fellow, who was beginning early in youth a shameful career. What did it matter if he went to the hangman?

The evil deeds of his own son were forgotten. Why, his sensual, wine-flavored, self-indulgent life, his gaming and sins looked clean, of course, beside the crime of this one, come up from the air of shops and trade-riots.

They picked their way out. Sylvia shivered, glad that he had not spoken, yet cut to the quick by the open neglect. The crowd still lingered, watching the elegant Gilliat carriage roll away, and then waiting for the other to be started on his journey.

After awhile the three went up-stairs. Victor was strangely calm, and helped them all to keep their self-possession.

"It will only be for a few days," said Trewartha. "If Cragness and the Cedars are not enough, we will put the whole county under bonds."

Victor took Sylvia's hands. At first she could not speak; but he read the face slowly. So changed, so full of pain and heroic tenderness, and sublimed by a faith that thrilled him to the heart's core.

"I am clean in your eyes?" he whispered, the voice hoarse and tremulous, though scarcely above a breath.

For answer she bowed a little, letting her veil fall, and under cover of it, she pressed her lips to the hand that held hers. He knew then the secret of her soul. What did it matter to her? Was there any shame in the truth, the noble integrity that she was henceforth to make her standard?

Trewartha insisted that they should leave him there. He did not want them to remember the other picture—the lad they loved going off to a felon's cell with a constable by his side.

Anah Hurst sat by the window, waiting. John had been very drowsy all day, and was now asleep. Seeing them come, she went down the path.

"Oh!" with a wild, despairing cry, reading the secret in their pained faces.

Janet McRae took her in in her strong arms, towering above her like a man.

"Anah Hurst, the hand of God is laid heavily upon us. If He ever heard prayer or cry of yours, pray to Him now. As for me—well, I think I've been my own God. All my life I have glorified my own works. I have pulled down and builded up, measured the souls of men and women, and meted out my own justice or beneficence. I thought to do so with *him*. Don't curse me in your mother's grief. I meant to make him rich and honored, and give him a high station for my own pleasure. This is the work of my hands, the punishment of my pride. Friends, pray for me as well as him."

They never forgot that tone of strong agony and bitter humiliation.

"No, no!" Anah Hurst said, wanderingly.

"You and John have the right secret of life, maybe. Children, I am an old, old woman. Be merciful." And with that she sank down on the door-step, while her vigorous frame shook as if palsied.

Anah Hurst kissed the cold lips, and then said, in a strong, calm voice—

"I too, have a duty. I believe God has transformed my heaviest cross into the means of saving my son. I must see Kirke Gilliat this very night, before I sleep. Will you take me to St. Albans, Doctor Trewartha?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

Sylvia decided to go to St. Albans also. James Redmond's body was lying at the house of Rachel Braisted, still unburied, and she must learn her mother's wishes upon the subject. Although she felt wretchedly weak she nerved both soul and body for the task.

Long before they reached their journey's end, the night set in, gloomy and starless. They wound round the ghostly hills, the two women clasping hands tightly under cover of their shawls, drawing so near to each other, yet neither knowing what was in the other's heart, only the chain of broad, common suffering.

Trewartha handed them out at length. Sylvia led her companion up the broad hotel steps, through the wide hall to a reception-room, and sent a message to Mr. Gilliat.

Mr. Milnor answered the summons.

"My friend is so utterly worn out and exhausted that he can see no one this evening. I might possibly attend to your business, if it is urgent."

"No," she answered, quietly. "I *must* see him." Then, drawing a folded paper from her reticule, she continued—"Will you please hand him this?"

She had sent her own name first. It gave her woman's heart a bitter pang to know he had cared so little that he had never taken the trouble to inquire what her destiny might be, and as Mrs. Hurst, in his sight, she was simply the mother of a criminal.

Kirke Gilliat opened the paper with an impatient frown. "Has the woman no delicacy?" he flung out angrily. "Yet what could one expect?"

"Anah McRae Hurst. Northfield, 18—"

He staggered with the suddenness of the blow, and dashed his clinched hand against his forehead.

"Milnor!" glancing wildly around—"stay—I must see her—where we cannot be interrupted. Will you allow me the use of your room?"

For it would never do to talk to Anah McRae with only a door between her voice and his wife. Mrs. McRae of Cragness. He saw it all now. If he had known of the connection before!

After giving Milnor time to escort her thither, he walked slowly up the stairs, a horrible thought of retribution entering his mind. Had the old warning been interpreted as a curse in his case? "The sins of the fathers—"

She was standing in the middle of the dimly-lighted room, a pale, plainly-dressed gentlewoman, not to be compared to Beatrice Gilliat, her senior by some years. But the chances of life had been so different. Toil and poverty had left their signet, coming out plainer now that she was weary and suffering. The man's fastidious sense took it all in, judging without understanding the hidden causes.

"My God!" he said; "I never guessed that you were *his* mother!"

"Yes;" steadying her voice. "I have borne my pain alone these many years, and I have come to lay a part of it on your shoulders. It is *your* son, Kirke Gilliat, who is to sleep in a felon's cell to-night."

"Oh, Anah!" with a wild cry of anguish as the truth was thus certified. "A brother's hand raised against brother!"

"Yes, it *was* that, though Victor is innocent. It was the son of the free woman against the son of the bond woman;" with a shrill, hysterical laugh.

"No, it cannot be," he said. "You mock me."

For, with all that sharp, clear evidence before him, he could *see* the guilt of Victor Hurst, and it added to his pang; while

she, believing him innocent, had not the horrible certainty to drive her to despair.

"You know nothing about him;" in her earnest, decisive way, for now all the old hesitation had dropped off like a worn-out garment. "He has had his faults—but he never told me, his mother, a deliberate lie in his life. If he had been guilty, he would have kept silence."

"But you—married?"

"I did. After the announcement of Kirke Gilliat's espousal of his cousin, I married a good, honorable man, who had secretly loved me a long while, and who offered me a name for myself, and my child. And yet it was hardly my own wish. Not that I had any doubt of my own right—you had taken good care of that," smiling bitterly. "But to me that false marriage was a life-long sacred bond. Had I stood entirely alone in the world, I think I would have borne the shame. If I could have found a place for my child, where he would not have been crowded to the wall for another man's sin, I might still have braved the consequences. But the faces that smiled on you would have been shocked at sight of me. The falsehood and deception that they could forgive on the man's part, was whiteness compared to a simple act of trust on a woman's."

He knew of a sin blacker than any of which she held him guilty. If he could make reparation here and now; but that was madness.

"My son!" he answered, hoarsely. "And this man—whom you married—"

"I am not sure but that it was a crime. I could not see clearly in those days, when I was racked with anguish and despair; but I knew well that he would watch over me, that my pain and shame would be his through his love; that to see me disgraced in the world's estimation, thrust out to perish, would cause him more suffering than if he befriended me; and I did my best to repay him. Perhaps I had no right thus to save

myself, having once believed and loved—my only crime. For I think even now that you will bear witness to some fears and hesitation on my part. I would fain have delayed the ceremony, used only to quiet my conscience, by a man who was integrity itself to his compeers, men of the world, who would have scorned a lie in any business transaction, but thought it no sin to deceive the woman who loved him, to betray her with the most sacred vow a man ever can give."

"Have mercy," he cried, weakly, "have mercy! If you could know all the—the circumstances."

"The results I *do* know. My son defrauded of his just birthright, and now in a prison cell, accused of a monstrous crime; and our lives with their nameless blight and pain."

"God help me!" and he began to pace the room. "Tell me what to do. But how *can* I save him?"

She read the marks of anguish in the still handsome but worldly face, yet she understood now that all pangs were evanescent with this nature, in which there was some weak, fatal flaw.

"God knows what I would give to go back now to the hour of our parting."

Having lived through the past, and not found in it the complete satisfaction that it had promised, he would fain have it different. Was that repentance for his sin against her? She felt and spurned the paltry concession.

"We have nothing to do with the past, Mr. Gilliat," she returned, coldly. "You have a wife, and I a husband. Even if it were not so, you would see the difference between us too plainly. If I lacked culture, beauty, and elegance in the days of my youth, a hard, narrow life has only added to the wants."

"No, it was not that," vehemently. "There was a kind of fate planned out for me from the first."

"Did I ask for your love? for this miserable mockery of marriage?"

She felt his cowardice and cruelty so keenly. A little truth

in the beginning would have saved these terrible complications, and a hard wrench then would have proved more merciful than this life-long agony.

He came back and seated himself at the table, leaning his chin upon his hand. The light being in range, gave her his face distinctly. How much ease, indulgence, and self-love had gone into it with the years. She knew another that had taken some of its best points, but her misgiving for this young, vigorous life had strangely ended. For the past six months it had reached a truer comprehension of the honest, earnest purpose that saves souls from baser self-engrossment.

"Tell me what to do." His voice was strained and hoarse, and seemed to have in it something of womanish pain. "Every particle of testimony went against him. My son as well! Good God! this is a bitter retribution. If I *could* believe him innocent!"

"If I could not have told you this truth I should not have come. You can at least refrain from persecuting him. You can give him the chance of any doubt that may arise. The rest must be left to a higher power—God."

He rose again and approached her. The face was pure and proud, and gave token of a higher spiritual life than his. He knew then how he was judged, and in spite of the old love, despised.

"He shall not want for anything, and if I could change circumstances—"

"I only ask that his own father may not hurry him to final shame;" and her voice was clearly cold. "He has friends—money; do not think I came for these."

"You are the last of the McRaes, I believe."

"Janet McRae is the last of her pure line;" with an emphasis that stung him keenly.

"But—"

"If you are thinking of—Victor in connection with Mrs. McRae, I can tell you that he would never take his disgrace

there. When my husband dies, my son and I will leave the places that have known us, and begin anew."

"Then he is aware—" and Kirke Gilliat's pale, tortured face flushed the deepest crimson.

"Yes. I could not keep the horrible secret out of my eyes on that fatal morning;" her voice sharpening unconsciously.

He covered his eyes with his hands and was silent a long while.

"God knows that I am glad to have him feel innocent. I cannot take it all in now, with the dead lying in yonder room, but you may trust us."

"That is enough."

She rose as if she would go. Why should he detain her? What could he offer in extenuation of his deep and deadly sin? He felt as if a decade of years had swept over him. His limbs were feeble, his brain stunned, confused.

"The sin is too great to be forgiven," he said, weakly.

She knew what he meant, but she could not take his hand there. Her pangs had been too keen and bitter, besides, she realized more keenly than ever how she had loved this man, and how, in spite of all, the pain had lasted through weary years. She wished him no ill, but she could not begin to wish him well just at this moment.

"God is merciful."

With that she turned away. He made no effort to detain her, for the consequences of his sin overwhelmed and humiliated him.

Anah Hurst found her way down the stairs to the main hall. Sylvia was waiting with a tired, awe-stricken face. Neither asked the other any questions as Dr. Trewartha drove homeward over the dark, silent road.

Mrs. Redmond was still too weak and hysterical to give any advice, so Rachel Braisted ordered the burial of Sylvia's father. At St. Albans there was a general dispersion, owing in part to the lateness of the season as well as to the terrible tragedy.

Mr. Gilliat sought his friend Milnor the next morning, who was shocked at the change a night had wrought. He seemed quite like an old man, with his gray, wrinkled face, hesitating gait, and slow, wandering speech.

"Milnor," he began, "I place this matter in your hands. It may not be quite as we think. If there is any chance to—to prove the young man innocent, throw no obstacle in the way. And if you will see him—you may be able to judge better."

Mr. Milnor was silent from amazement.

"Yes, see him. Bring me a report. That is all."

"Anything in my power shall be most cheerfully done, rest assured of that."

"And now we must make preparations for our return to Rothermel. Mrs. Gilliat is most anxious to get away."

"But will she be able to take the journey?"

"She has resolved upon it."

After Beatrice Gilliat came out of her long, death-like swoon, she began to gather strength and courage for this step. She would have been glad of Mrs. Redmond's company; but that was quite impossible, for Margaret Redmond was utterly crushed by the two blows, and the downfall of her brightest hopes. James Redmond had been to St. Albans, had plead for an interview with his daughter, and met with a cold repulse. What Margaret would have done finally, she hardly knew; but she was determined not to confess James Redmond's existence until Sylvia's marriage was accomplished. But to do her justice, she had no thought of his dying so soon; and she was humiliated by the fear of his having repeated the substance of the conversation. Then to her mind Sylvia was in some way answerable for Eustace Gilliat's death, and the loss of honor and wealth that might have accrued to her.

It was past midnight when they reached the cottage, where Janet McRae was anxiously waiting. She wisely forebore to question, but took Sylvia in her arms like the tenderest of

mothers. Trewartha threw himself on the sofa; but no one slept, thinking of him whose abode was a prison cell.

Victor Hurst had been overwhelmed by the mass of evidence against him. No one realized more clearly than he the terrible situation in which he had been placed by the culmination of untoward circumstances. He could hardly believe it at first, and the coroner's verdict stunned him.

But keener than all was the other shame and agony—the secret that he had read in his mother's eyes, the thought of the hatred that had been a subtle, underlying curse. If his hands were clean, was his heart quite clear? There had been jealousy and envying from the night of their first ill-fated meeting. And yet would he have willingly changed lives with the lawful son of Kirke Gilliat, have taken his narrow soul, his vapid brain, his indolence and vices?

No: a thousand times no! He saw clearly now, how little birth and so-called pure blood could do for a man. A large, true, earnest soul was needed to lift him out of the slough up there, as well as down yonder among the shops and crowded streets. A man must work for himself, though all these helps were far from being despised. He had toiled night after night on the lines of some drawing, where books or a teacher would have opened his eyes hours sooner. And there, in his little nook among the ledges of the mountain, he had tried to cut the secret ambition of his soul into shape. He understood now what it was. For the sake of that love and desire he could endure poverty, cold, hunger, and loneliness cheerfully, so that he might succeed at the last.

Yet in a dim, far-off way he was beginning to see other truths. Was ambition the best thing to life? Were there not duties, sacred trusts, grand truths to be evolved and applied to every-day matters?

And now, remembering Eustace Gilliat, as he had seen him more than once, with his flushed face and watery eyes, the effeminate, sensual expression of his weak countenance, he

fancied what John Hurst must have dreaded for him. There were temptations on every hand. This young man had his father's position to keep him up: he, Victor, would have gone swiftly down the rushing current. At this moment he did John Hurst full justice. In some strange way he seemed to understand what there had been to go against—his own hot, headstrong temper, his hasty, unreasoning dislikes, and the impossibility of one soul reading another so perfectly that all its wants and hungering could be fathomed at a glance. Humanity was grander and more abstruse than a bit of rock or clay.

In these communings he lost sight of the fate which girded him about. There was a Hand in it all, whose workings he could not master in his thoughts; a scheme of something that he was not wise enough to translate. But he felt the Power in this awful night of loneliness, the Mightier spirit guiding the work of justice which will surely come hereafter if not here. He had been kept from staining his hands with a brother's blood, even though the whole world believed him guilty. God only could bring out the truth. He seemed to realize how impotent all human strength and foresight were, and he cried to God, not in despair, but with a faith that grew strong even while it trembled.

Janet McRae and Sylvia left early the next morning. Trewartha went to Taunton and heard some tidings which he took to Victor at once.

"An odd enough circumstance—the first end of the mystery that I fancy we can unravel. If Smith Carson could have known he would have given this testimony at the inquest. He sold the pistol to your brawler Jarvis, only the day before the murder. He has seen and identified it. Some months ago he bought it of a young fellow rather hard up for his next meal, and it was lying in the shop-window with a lot of other traps. He remembered the letter 'H.'"

Victor raised his awe-stricken face. "I see," he said, in a

slow, husky tone, for the words well-nigh strangled him. "The shot was meant for me!"

And then he buried his face in his hands. What strange power had intervened? Who only but God, meting out the punishment to some farther back sin could have turned aside the fatal messenger. Why should Eustace Gilliat have been taken, and he left?

For up to this moment he had believed it some unseen enemy of Gilliat's.

Trewartha came and laid his hand upon the yonng man's shoulder.

"After all, you had nothing to do with it; and if report speaks truly, his life was not likely to be much of an honor to any one."

"But I can never forget that his life has been given for mine."

"Not willingly;" with a short, abrupt laugh.

The deeper and more solemn significance to him Trewartha would never know. But when at length he raised his face, there was a new and solemn expression in it that no years would ever be able to obliterate.

"So I placed the matter in the hands of an officer immediately, and a warrant for Jarvis will be taken out at once. I think by noon bail can be arranged, and you will have comparative freedom. I shall be glad, for your father is fretting sorely."

Ah, he should never question *that* love again.

"Do what is best," he answered quietly.

But Trewartha could not take it so calmly. He had already stirred up half of Taunton, and now, if possible, there was more excitement than before. Jarvis had been hanging round the quarry on the day of the murder, considerably intoxicated, and had been heard to utter threats then, as well as several times before. When the matter came to be thoroughly sifted, there was enough suspicion to justify his arrest.

Janet McRae was all warmth and eagerness when she heard the tidings.

"Use every effort," she said to Trewartha. "Spare no money nor pains."

Then her horses were ordered and she drove over to Taunton, gaining her point at length, for she brought Victor home to his mother.

"Take him back," she cried. "Heaven knows he is worth all this and more. And if the testimony I gave went against you, it tore my own soul to utter it. I would have cut off my right hand sooner."

He clasped the hand in his, and bowing reverently, kissed it.

"I owe you a debt that can never be repaid," he returned brokenly.

"No, no;" turning her head away and speaking loudly.

Then the mother and son were left alone. He placed his arm around her neck and drew the weary head to his broad shoulder.

"It is God's hand. I have been a blind, insensate stone; nay worse, a doubter, a mocker. But last night I was alone with *Him!* And when a man comes face to face with this strong arm he calls fate—"

"There is no such thing. It is God working in all and through all, resolving the tangles we make of our lives in our blind way. Our human wisdom is foolishness."

He knew it then. He had cried out and kicked against the rough stones in his way, but not one had been placed there without a purpose, since through it all he had been led to see more clearly. Not that the old shame would be lifted, but made to serve a wise purpose in some way yet to be revealed. For humanity itself was growing to be a so much larger thing in his mind. When he saw how every simple act affected some other being for weal or woe, he understood how necessary it was to keep the springs of the soul pure and true, to save one man from the mire and foulness all around, if he

could do no more. It was not wealth or culture or ease and leisure that redeemed souls, although these helped, and his eyes were too clear now to rush to the other extreme and undervalue them; but they were not all. Back in the shop the men's coarseness and vile breath had annoyed him, yet he doubted if their sins were worse in God's sight than that of the refined and fastidious Kirke Gilliat.

You will see that the old spirit of self-aggrandizement was falling off, like the dry, useless leaves that enclose the fruit-bud. They were needed once, for there is no purely useless thing in the economy of nature; and as a man's soul must be brave and earnest and helpful within before it can work profitably without, when it comes to blossom the unsightly husk may wither and drop—it is not needed. He felt now that there was a wider work in the world than that for one's own self.

"Yes," glancing out to the barred sky of sapphire where the coming night brooded with infinite tenderness. "*He*," nodding to the adjoining room, "held the key to the mystery. I don't know whether God called him to give up his life and all, but to-night I would rather have his work, even to the poor, feeble souls which he has helped redeem, than anything Kirke Gilliat has done."

She came and looked into his eyes, kissed him on the lips with speechless love, like a blessing after long waiting.

"Not that I have come to that height where I can forgive him. We make our greatest mistakes in fancying that we can change the current of our natures in a few hours, when instead, it is a lifelong work."

"And we find the old evils that we have imagined conquered coming back from the graves where we laid them. It is a warfare all along the way. The promise is—'to him that overcometh.'"

To him that overcometh evil. Not to him who wins the glories of this world—fame, wealth, position, and honor alone.

There was a better, broader sphere, the deep mystery of things unseen, that might gain neither reward nor simple justice in this life; but they were God's immutable laws, nevertheless, and on the other side of the sapphire sky He took these things into His own hands.

Trewartha worked indefatigably. In less than a fortnight Jarvis had been found, concealed in a low den. When the braggadocio of liquor had been strong upon him, he had weakly made some damaging boasts. One circumstance after another, trivial in itself, came to light, and began to form a conclusive chain of evidence. Public opinion swayed at once, and Victor became a sort of hero, partly on account of his remarkable escape from a doom planned for him.

Another peculiar circumstance occurred, which brought with it a keen surprise and pleasure—the sudden reappearance of Paul Latour, who had been searching vainly for his friend, and on the first tidings of his danger had found his way to Cragness. From him Trewartha and Milnor heard the episode at Bohmerwald, which exonerated Victor completely.

With this array of evidence before the grand jury, the indictment was changed, and Victor Hurst honorably cleared from the slightest suspicion.

Milnor hastened to Rothermel with the tidings; his sympathies warmly enlisted in the young man's behalf.

"I regret nothing so much as that I did not make a stronger effort to see him when Miss Lowndes wished me to. With all her shallow assumption she was right enough here."

"You think him—talented, then?"

The voice had a curiously hollow sound, and the hand on which Kirke Gilliat rested his face trembled visibly.

"They are peculiar people—all these Hursts. The mother has a quiet strength in her soft, sad eyes, and she worships her son passionately. I don't know what the father has been, for he is a paralytic now, and his brain has not escaped; but the son's devotion to him, to them both, is remarkable. A strong,

handsome youth, with a fine, rare soul, hitherto little understood; but he is in the right place now. My lifelong regret will be that I did not give him a helping hand in his hour of need."

"He has genius, then?"

"That was where I stumbled. I was right in saying that he would never make a painter, but he has been exercising his talent in marble-cutting, and produced a bust of Sylvia Redmond which is really wonderful. I think with ten years of study and practice he might immortalize himself."

Would it be too late to claim him, presently, to lavish upon him the gifts of Rothermel? Rather it would be the proper atonement for all this early neglect and wrong.

"You have not described him, yet you rouse me to a strange interest."

Milnor was softly pacing the antique room, with its painted panels and dark wainscoting, its diamonded windows with the light flickering quaintly through the small panes, the tall library across one end, and the family portraits ranged at even spaces down the sides.

"There is something odd about the face that haunts me, as if I must have seen it before. Strong, resolute, handsome, with a blending of Greek and Saxon and a peculiar tawny tint of hair. Fiery, forceful, yet tempered with an inward grace."

"Well," impatiently, when the pause had been very long, and the measured steps ceased.

"He looks as if he might have kinship with your mother, Gilliat. Yes, that must be it. What a strange resemblance!" glancing at the portrait.

Kirke Gilliat said no more. His mother had been a queen among women, too early lost for him. If this Victor Hurst possessed half her nobleness!

He rose and tottered to the door. If, when the choice had been his—to have a son who would love and honor him in his old age, a son of whom he could be proud—. The old

curse coming home. The mill grinding slowly but—"exceeding small."

In her stately, elegant room lay Beatrice Gilliat. The shock of her son's death had been severe, not cutting her off suddenly, as Trewartha feared, but sapping the springs of life. She was nearly helpless now. The sharp terror had sent the blood in masses to her brain, slowly dulling every faculty, sight, hearing, speech, and at intervals thought.

But in some moments there came pangs of fierce agony. A vision of Hugh Gilliat, and her pitiless watching, her aims and plans and patience. She had gained her wish, been Kirke Gilliat's wife, and mistress of Rothermel.

And here at middle age, with her beauty hardly impaired, she was dying by inches. Other women lived to a happy old age, saw their sons and daughters growing up around them, and had grandchildren to prattle at their knee. Other women were loved and caressed, but save for a brief year's infatuation there had been little of this in her life. And now Kirke Gilliat brooded over his dead son continually, she saw the far, awesome light in his eyes when he looked at her. Had she come between him and some cherished hope?

Well for her that she was never to know. He would be kind, attentive, solicitous to the very last; but in the depths of his heart there would be a corner where her beauty and imperious grace had never penetrated. After all, had she not reaped as she had sown? For to the world's end the old law will hold good—the purple bloom of thistle will not turn into the purple bloom and fragrance of grapes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

EVENTFUL as the winter was at Cragness, it appeared to pass very quietly. A mild, rather open season, leaving but a few weeks in which the click of hammers and picks, and the rumble of blasting might not be heard at the quarry. Everything worked favorably, and Victor found that he should finish his contract in a much shorter time than he anticipated.

The trial had come and gone. The one positive link was supplied by the confession of the now abject Jarvis, who, like the coward he was, begged piteously for his life. The fatal shot had been meant for Victor Hurst. How it had gone so wide of its mark could only be accounted for by the fact of the man being grossly intoxicated.

"I cannot wonder that father's soul was so moved against intemperance," Victor said, solemnly. "It has been the cause of this misfortune from first to last."

So the verdict was manslaughter. Mr. Milnor tried to keep Eustace Gilliat's story as far in the background as possible. Then the excitement died away, and there was no change save that Victor had gained warm, appreciative friends.

There was no need of stolen, secret work. A room in the little cottage was arranged for Victor's use—his mother would have it so. She filled one window with flowers, and Trewartha brought some choice pictures. Mr. Milnor dropped in and watched the young man at his self-taught labor, guided by the finer impulses of soul and brain. Paul had a corner where he sat and played on his violin and worshipped his young friend. Drifting farther apart in purpose, they were still

brought nearer together by the tie of a peculiar and romantic friendship.

Victor used to carry his father thither and place him on the wide lounge with the cushions all about, Day by day he grew weaker, gentler. He loved to listen to the weird, impassioned melody evoked by Paul, and to watch Victor's strong white fingers as some thought slowly budded and blossomed beneath them.

Trewartha was a welcome guest to all, as well as Janet McRae, who often lingered, studying the group, and especially the young man, so strong in himself that he could disdain her gifts.

"I don't know why I should care so much for him, Trewartha," she would exclaim, almost angrily. "I cannot say that he is ungrateful, either; but there is something about him that is hard to understand."

Trewartha thought so, as well. It was not merely the pride of being a self-made man, nor a shallow disdain of the assistance wealth could give. An underlying motive that time only could fathom and he had no better advice than the patience he used to recommend daily to himself.

There was one who never came; but perhaps she was the more in Victor's thoughts. He worked at this particular bit of marble only when he was alone. Now and then Trewartha would spy some improvement—an added grace, a fine touch.

Sylvia Redmond had gone from her father's grave to St. Albans. At first her mother received her ungraciously; but the child's voice was tenderer than that of the nurse, her touch more gentle, her patience of a rarer quality. Not until arrangements were made for closing the house would she consent to be removed, and then Rachel Braisted insisted upon it.

Sylvia took her post beside the querulous invalid,—a weak, restless, dissatisfied woman, whose trials had been sorer, whose misfortunes had been greater, and whose nerves were more finely sensitive than those of any other human being. Full of

petty tyrannies and exactions, quick to remark and distort the least change of voice or manner, and brooding continually over her own pains and woes, Sylvia had no light task to soothe or comfort. The frivolous mind possessed no resources within itself, now that worldly gayeties were at an end. These grave, gentle women, full of almsgiving and good deeds, were exceedingly tiresome to her, and the world outside found little to charm in the faded, weak-souled being. Doctor Trewartha alone was welcome, and even then, if he talked a moment too long with Sylvia, the grace of the visit was dimmed.

What Sylvia endured, the God who gave her courage and patience alone knew. She grew thin and worn, and deep shadows settled under the eyes that had once held a child's glad, eager hope.

Two or three times through the course of the winter Trewartha had persuaded her into a brief drive, but she would call nowhere.

"Have you ceased to care for your old friends?" he asked one day. "You positively shun Mrs. McRae and Ruth."

"It is best that I should keep to my duty only," in her sad, quiet voice.

"But if your physical strength should get exhausted too soon?" with a look of intense anxiety.

"It will not. Do not feel troubled about me, dear friend."

She listened when he spoke of Victor, but asked no questions. It seemed quite impossible to rouse her to any warm, human interest; and Trewartha had a wild fear that her mother's death would snap the frail chords that bound her to earth.

The blow was mercifully sudden. Mrs. Redmond would hear nothing of death, and seemed to shrink from it with a peculiar horror. It was well, therefore, that the closing pang should be brief.

They laid her beside her husband one dull, lowering Feb-

ruary day, as if in keeping with the shady part of her life, now gone up to be judged of God.

Sylvia was unnaturally grave and composed, and rode back with her cousins. But Trewartha followed her to the sitting-room before she could divest herself of her wrappings.

"I am to be master, now," and an under-current of power that she had no strength to resist floated in with the words from his strong, tender tone. "You need a change, or I will not answer for your life."

"Does it matter much?" in her weary manner.

"I think it does. Miss Rachel, you will trust me, I know."

He carried her down to his own light wagon that stood at the gate, and wrapped her well with the robes. Then touching the coal-black horses, they were off like the wind. Sylvia was forced to gasp for breath; and the exertion brought a tint of color to her pale lips, though the white face looked very wan and tired.

He paused at length at Cragness. She would fain have resisted, but he lifted her out, led her up the broad steps with his strong arm around her, the small feet barely touching the ground.

"Friend Janet," he exclaimed, "here is a work and a duty—to bring this bit of marble back to the rosy flesh and blood we found here a year ago."

Only a year! Sylvia shivered. It seemed ten at least.

Ruth came over, her slow-moving eyes full of tender pity, and began to unfasten the wraps as if Sylvia had been a baby.

"You will care for her tenderly."

If he had asked Ruth Garnier to walk to the mouth of a fiery, burning crater, she would have obeyed.

"Child, there has been many a sad hour in the year," and Janet McRae drew her down to the ample lap, and pressed her to the beating heart still firm and strong; "but, please God, there will be sunshine again."

"Never for me," the aching heart cried inwardly.

The change did not come a moment too soon. For a week Sylvia wavered, lying on the sofa most of the time, brightening only through Trewartha's visits.

Ruth watched them with a peculiar fascination. Why had she felt so much more satisfied and at ease when she heard that Sylvia was to marry Eustace Gilliat? What pain was this running through her pulses like a bit of fiery, jagged lightning?

And as Sylvia gained she began to lose. For presently a gleam of health shone in the eyes, and the hollow cheeks began to round to their olden contour. The little hands no longer shook like a stray leaf in the autumn blast, but had a firm, warm clasp of their own. And hers were always cold now, save for these fitful flashes.

She tried to think how it would be. Especially one day, when Doctor Trewartha took them both over to the Cedars to lunch. She sat at the head of the table after a little demur, but it was to Sylvia he talked, and Sylvia who gave back sweet, dainty, answering smiles. What was it that made women loved so easily,—that thrust the less fortunate ones aside?

Sylvia ran over the house and exhumed mines of treasures, questioned, teased, thereby giving out glimpses of her olden self. Was it because she was tired that she should pause presently before the wide grate, and slip into a great cushioned chair, where Trewartha found her, with her eyes shut but not asleep, the firelight crowning her drooping head?

The fitful March day had vibrated from gusts to sunshine. Now a flurry of snow thickened the air and made a kind of hoar twilight.

Trewartha went in search of Ruth, who was standing alone by the great basin of lilies, herself as white as they, save the crown of dusky hair.

"Come," he said.

She turned with a sharp pain. Would they not let her have

a moment in which she could escape from the vivid picture of their love and happiness? And then she shook her head.

"Go to Sylvia," she cried, with sudden heat and emphasis. "Sylvia is resting, curled up in a great chair like a kitten. Will you come and look at her?"

He reached over for her hand. It was cold and passive, and the lips trembled.

"I will not disturb her," she said. "Go yourself."

He laughed low and provokingly, reading what she thought so securely hidden.

"Why are your hands so cold? And why are you pale and grave? Has the winter taken away your warmth and bloom?"

"You hurt me!" as his clasp tightened. "I came here to be alone, to think—"

"And of what avail is the endless thinking? Does it bring you any nearer the great truth? Why do you not open the eyes of your soul, of your spirit?"

"Because—I was born blind!" passionately.

"No, you were not. No woman ever is until she makes some black, wilful blindness for herself. Look up at me, Ruth. Can you read any secret in my face?"

A faint color stirred in hers and the lips trembled. Then some power stronger than herself shook her very soul and forced her to speak over a great pang.

"I think you love Sylvia Redmond?"

"Yes, I love her;" and he smiled in his peculiar, wayward fashion. "I love her as one loves a child. I should like to be her father, Ruth, and have a right to order all her pretty ways; to chide when she was too grave, as she often is now; to have a brave young lover come, whose smile would bring roses to her cheeks; to give her a wedding-breakfast in this old hall, and to keep her still, to see her children playing around my knees, and to kiss their soft, warm faces. Yet it may never happen."

Her eyes opened wide with an intent, startled light.

"And you read nothing else?"

"Let me go," she cried, as a quick pain pierced her very soul.

"Why? Am I so distasteful? Ruth, you are jealous of Sylvia."

"I jealous!" in a hard, hollow, incredulous tone, the lines about the mouth growing rigid, and the eyes downcast.

"Yes. Child, *are* you blind? Can you not see that I love you, *you?*"

"No, I will not come between. She is sweet and fond. She loves you," with a strange, pathetic cry that moved his whole soul.

"So, the lesson is all to learn. Janet McRae taught you as much as one woman can teach another: the rest is a man's province. Listen, Ruth, I am twice your age. In the hot, impatient days of youth, I had one mad passion-dream that burned to ashes before the woman lay cold in her grave. Yet if she had been true—if she had loved me! Will you dare to bridge over that broken path? I am wiser, more patient, yet the boy's folly is not all gone. My soul obeys the universal law, but forgive if it demands the best. The night Mrs. McRae brought Victor Hurst home, I knew that I loved you. Have I not waited long enough?"

"Oh," she said, abashed and distressed, "I have no right; for she—"

"Yes; I knew her plans. I said, if this woman *can* love another, I will stand back. He is younger, fresher, and it is my friend's wish. But you could not—"

"No, I could not;" with a shiver. "And I think he never loved me. If I am slow and grave and passionless—"

"My darling, hearts respond only to the touch which rouses them. There is much yet to learn. May I be your teacher?"

She raised her eyes slowly and he read assent.

Sylvia came to find them long afterward.

"It is growing dusk," she said. "I fell asleep there by the fire and had a delicious rest. But we must go home."

Ruth stooped and kissed Sylvia with sudden fervor.

Once at Cragness, he sent his horses to the stable. While the girls went to smoothe their ruffled plumes, he sought Mrs. McRae.

"Frank Trewartha, I have a scolding ready for you. Does lunch at the Cedars last all day?" and she glanced sharply at him.

"Mother Janet, be merciful to your son, who henceforward will do his best to please you, and who entreats you for Ruth. Bid him God speed, for he only holds the key of her soul. It is not what you planned."

"No. My plans are fine failures," in a tone of asperity that showed she still felt a pang of disappointment. "I have trained human bodies, but shall never meddle with a human soul again. Go your way. Love and marry. I am a lonely old woman, with no birdling in the nest."

But she smiled that night when she saw them together, while her heart yearned over Sylvia.

March softened into showery April, and May laughed at them both with her bosom full of blossoms. The old story of life and death and change went on, and brought to Victor Hurst the freedom that he had once so coveted. For John Hurst fell asleep calmly, trusting in the God whom he had served in his honest, earnest way, according to the light vouchsafed. What life is exempt from mistakes and failures? Well for us that God gathers up the fragments and shapes them anew in the likeness of Himself and His glorified Son.

A sweet, tranquil death. Anah Hurst would always remember it. Not one pang did she care to have taken back—not one of the many trials.

One night, late in May, Victor found Sylvia in the old churchyard and walked home with her. Both were strangely silent at first. She was thinking of what she had heard that

day. The quarry contract was completed, and another had been offered. But Janet McRae had gone down to the cottage and said her say to Victor Hurst and his mother, commanding them to think the matter well over before they answered her.

"He will not consent," she declared to Trewartha; "I saw it in his eyes. Something that we shall never know holds him. But I can do no more, no more. If I must sit alone at last by my fireside, so let it be. If the work of my whole life crumbles to ashes, I cannot help nor hinder. Why should I have been led to love the lad so well only to know a more bitter desolation at the last? Is it some punishment for my pride and vain-glory?"

This was fresh in Sylvia's mind. Her own passionate grief she scarcely remembered. She had never dared to love as Ruth, and other happier women, and yet she knew well that this man held all the rose-color of her otherwise neutral-tinted life. She had known so much sorrow, so little real joy.

And yet now she pitied Mrs. McRae profoundly. The loneliness appeared tenfold more painful to her. Why could he not consent and stay?

Here was the great house looming before them. He might be master of it with a word. Yet, if he were a wanderer, an exile, a criminal even, her heart would always yearn toward him.

They came to the gate. "Will you not walk in?" she asked, in a half-hesitating, half-entreating way.

"I think not. It is best not;" as if to assure himself.

"You have decided to go away?"

Something in her soft tone stirred him strangely, an uncomplaining pathos, a lingering regret. Would she care?

"If I went I should be soon forgotten. Yes, it *is* best."

"No, you would not be forgotten;" in an assured tone, that moved him again. Why did he feel so weak and uncertain here with her?

"I suppose, being a man, the prospect *is* tempting. And to work one's way up to greatness, to win honor and fame—"

"I used to think a great deal of that," quietly. "I was ambitious. I wanted to do something above the common level, to win a position equal to—"

He paused. Eustace Gilliat in his grave, or the little girl by his side? for both had roused his ambition.

"As you will." There was a sad despair in her tone.

"I have come to look differently at life. A man may carve his soul into a statue, or write it through the measure of some glowing poem, yet he is not a better man because the world recognizes the fact and praises him. When we think of this little life, with its silver clasp of four score and ten years, and the greater one stretching out beyond, where God judges, and not the narrow vision of man, one needs to have something more than leaves—the well-ripened grain. God may require our brother's soul at our hands."

"Yes. The work with the higher, spiritual significance."

"So I have learned to think of others as well as myself. I do not want all pure personal aims."

"Think of her!" Sylvia exclaimed, with a choking throb in her throat. "And the duties here—"

He turned, glancing abstractedly to the pale gleam where the young moon was coming up. Were there any duties here for him? Was it not rather a chimera of these women's brains? If the great law and power that he had called fate all his life was not working so strong and positive against him—

Between his eyes and the yellow glow yonder he saw Sylvia Redmond's face. The child-woman that he should always love, who in the long years to come would grow slowly into angelic ideality. From Trewartha he had heard the particulars of her brief engagement, and perhaps understood better than the Doctor himself how she had drifted into it. Her own pure self-denying life had begun with tenderest truth and courage at her dying father's bedside, and he freely pardoned the mistakes

of the past, holding no grudge against any moment of weakness. Had he any part and lot in her life, as she had in his? Would he not owe her some explanation, as well as Mrs. McRae, for the great wrench of final separation?

He came nearer, he took her cold, limp hand that began to tremble in his touch, sending fiery thrills through his veins. Yes, he loved her, loved her! Was she so far distant as to be quite unapproachable?

"Miss Redmond—Sylvia—my duty here has been exaggerated in ignorance. You know the old story of the bond woman and the free woman, and how the son of the former became an outcast. I have been weakly putting off something due to Mrs. McRae. When this is told the doors of Cragness will be opened wide before me, and I shall have the world beyond in which to make my mark. I am not like other men"—his steely eyes deepening, and the scarlet lip in a quiver. "Some men have to bear about with them the result of the sins of others. I am one."

It seemed at the moment as if she would have fallen, if she had not clutched his arm in that eager, desperate fashion.

"John Hurst—" she faltered.

"His record is clear and noble. It is my mother and I who must suffer for a cruel and bitter falsehood. While he who had been a father to me lived, my lips were sealed, and now I have been cowardly in putting off the evil day. There is a taint in my blood which would sully Cragness with its honorable ancestry. Yet why should I delay? Let me go and have it ended."

He opened the gate, standing aside for her to pass, and strode up the remainder of the path. She dragged herself along, her brain in a strange whirl, dimly guessing at the awful pain that he had borne, longing to comfort, and yet dumb with her own wordless anguish of love.

"I doubt if I ever cross this threshold again," he commented, sharply.

"I shall wait for you here," she said, sitting down in one of the great carved oaken hall-chairs. "Nothing can make any difference to a man's soul but his own sins."

He seized her hands in a strange transport. "And if I were an outcast, with the finger of honor pointed at me in scorn, —if I had to make a new name, to come up through poverty and toil, and perhaps fail, working against overpowering odds, what would I be to you then? nothing?"

The words were uttered in a low, hurried, passionate breath, and by the light he glanced at her pale face.

"You will still be Victor—my king. In God's world the one who wins is crowned, even though men may never discover the royal signet."

He stooped and kissed her hand with burning lips, then hurried to the door whose portals were to open upon his secret.

Janet McRae sat in her high-backed chair, with no light in the room, save the ruddy blaze of the pine-logs just kindled. Her face looked a little worn and perplexed, he thought.

"Have you brought Sylvia home? You would never come without an excuse, I fancy," she said, with some asperity. "I saw you half an hour ago walking down the road."

"I brought her in—yes." Then he paused, walking straight up to the brilliant firelight.

She saw something in his face,—a set resolve that was akin to the rigidity of death.

"Forgive!" and her tone softened, "I am a cranky old woman, but you try me, Victor Hurst, you try me!"

With that she came and stood beside him, placed her hand on his shoulder, and endeavored to read these baffling lines.

"It is for the last time;" and there was a touch of solemnity in his voice. "I have a story to tell you, and I think afterward you will be able to judge me more clearly. If I have been weak and cowardly in thus keeping it a secret, in coming here when I knew that I must one day be confessed other than

I appeared, remember in extenuation that it was not for my own sake. God gave me some duties to another, and when I began to see them, they were sacred in my eyes."

"There has always been some mystery about you. How far it was due to morbid pride—"

"I fought off that devil! No, it was an honest question between truth and silence. While I could not speak the truth, I compelled myself to risk being misunderstood, and perhaps considered ungrateful."

She held up her hand and he paused in his justification.

"You have been nobly generous. I think, too, that you have given me a strange, yearning love. I have felt as if I could be your very servant to your life's end; but that is not what you want. Sonship and heirship I cannot take,—the honor of this long, pure line is not for me. I am not John Hurst's son!"

"Not John Hurst's son! Not Anah McRae's child!" and her eyes seemed to pierce his very soul.

"Anah McRae's child—yes."

Her hand dropped from his shoulder, and a mortal paleness overspread her features. He crossed his arms on his chest, and stood there in the firelight crowned with youth, integrity, and manly beauty,—a soul replete with the highest capabilities. A man to make himself respected, honored, loved.

"Yes." His tone was low but strong and clear. "I must justify my mother. For a brief while she believed herself legally married to a man whose simple word would have been a bond to any of his compeers. God knows that it was not her fault nor mine that I was crowded out of an honorable birthright. But the world that can forgive crimes of revenge and dishonesty, has no condonement for this. Now you know why I could not accept your honors, your affection even, at its full value. Perhaps I was wrong to come in any event, but my purpose was simply to work. How could I dream—?"

Janet McRae took two or three steps and sank into her chair.

"Who knows this?" she demanded fiercely, though her voice was strangely hollow.

"My mother and myself, and—" yes, it was better to tell the whole truth now—"Kirke Gilliat."

She was silent so long, that he threw himself on his knees before her, and took the trembling hands in his.

"Forgive me," he cried in anguish. "It was not a fact one could soften. God knows that I would have spared you any pain that was possible. You see now why I must be an outcast until I earn a place among my fellow-men, and then I can never come wholly out of the shadow."

"Leave me now." Her voice was weak and broken, with the quaver of old age in it. "I must think a little. Kirke Gilliat's son!" wincing as if some one had struck her a blow.

"Bring your mother up here to-morrow—I must see her. And—I will tell you then."

He walked partly across the room, then came back to where she sat so bowed and stricken.

"You understand that I could not have taken your love or your honors with this secret untold. I should have loathed myself for cowardice and hypocrisy. There have been times when I could have cried out against God's injustice, as I thought it; but when Kirke Gilliat's sore punishment overtook him I was shamed into silence. There is a deeper lesson in it than I have yet learned. But wherever I go, to whatever station I may attain, this year at Cragness will be like the palm and the fountain in the desert of my life. How much I owe you for the sake of one dead, I never can put into words."

"I have not sent you away: remember that," she cried weakly. "You will come to-morrow."

Victor bowed and withdrew. Sylvia still sat crouched in the hall; but she glanced up with desperate, questioning eyes. He took her hand.

"I will bind you by no promises," he said. "You shall be quite free; but you must know—you do know, that I love

you. There may be brighter fortunes for you than to go into exile with me."

"I choose it, I choose it!" she cried, in accents of strong, steadfast faith. "Whatever you were, my love would be the same. If you had gone in silence, I must still have loved. For all time, forever."

He kissed the quivering lips, and strained her to his heart. No matter how great the wreck, he had saved this priceless treasure. One old dream had come true—she would be the judge and inspiration of his future, of his work. It was not so hard to be an outcast as it had looked an hour ago.

Doctor Trewartha and Ruth Garnier had the spacious room and glowing fire to themselves that evening. Sylvia went to bed directly after supper, and Madam McRae wanted solitude and silence. All the strong prejudices of a lifetime were to be combatted. The McRae blood might not be heroic, but it was clean, honorable, and through the long line there had been no such miserable soul as Eustace Gilliat. Was that God's way of punishing a secret sin? Ah, in the face of His sharp judgment what right had she to deal out anything but mercy? Why should she make the innocent suffer for the guilty? They had borne the burden, and he who laid it upon them had been prospered, honored. Should she swell the list of the world's false and easily-biased judges?

Her face was worn and gray at breakfast the next morning. Sylvia watched it furtively, but the stern lines never relaxed. And she hid the precious secret in her heart, gloating over it, that whatever came, she would not be thrust out of his life, but find there her work and her abiding-place.

The morning was strangely long. Doctor Trewartha came over and insisted upon taking Ruth and Sylvia out to drive; but Sylvia persisted in declining.

"Go to your room, then," said Mrs. McRae, brusquely. "I must be alone."

Watching from her window, she saw Victor Hurst and his

mother come up the winding avenue. At any other time she would have flown down-stairs; but now a secret delicacy forbade. She listened to Mrs. McRae's slow step, so unlike the tread of a day ago; and then she sat tormenting herself with the strange mischances of life—the mingled good and evil, like golden and gray threads in a warp.

It seemed hours to her. She saw the farm-hands go up and down; the sturdy women, with their careless gayety; and occasionally a stray child filling out the picture. Long afterward, a well-known form, that sent a strange, cold apprehension through every nerve. A summons for her, perhaps; for what should Mr. Gilliat want of any other inmate in that house.

She went down mechanically, for the mere sake of doing something; the solitude oppressed her so like a dead weight. Listening to the voices in the hall she went forward.

"Yes, Hannah, Mrs. Hurst is here, engaged with Mrs. McRae."

"Ah, Sylvia!" and Mr. Gilliat came toward her, taking both hands gravely, "I had not thought of seeing you here. My child, there have been many sorrows since our last meeting."

All the tragedy of their lives lay between.

"Do you know if I could see Mrs. Hurst—alone? If you will hand her this card?"

Sylvia ushered him into the seldom used drawing-room, and then tapped lightly at the other door.

"We are engaged," the voice replied, impatiently. She opened it the merest trifle. "Mrs. McRae, if you will please give this to Mrs. Hurst," thrusting forward the penciled message.

"Yes; run away, Sylvia, child;" and the door was shut.

She walked slowly up-stairs again, wondering. Would they never be done? And what could Mr. Gilliat want? How grave and sorrowful he looked. Ah, if these wearisome mys-

teries were only at an end, if she might hear the one voice so dear to her!"

When Anah Hurst entered the dim drawing-room, her eyes still bore traces of weeping; but there was a sad, sweet dignity about her, a blending of gracious, yet sorely-tried womanhood. She did not take the hand half-proffered; her heart was too full for mere courtesy toward Kirke Gilliat.

He apologized briefly for his intrusion. He had sought her at her cottage, and learning she was at Cragness had followed thither. Urgent business only could have prompted him to come. He had something to restore to her, and—

With that he placed a folded paper in her hands. She opened it slowly.

"Why do you bring me this now?" she asked, in great calmness. "If it was a mockery, then, what circumstances can ever make it less so?"

"It *is* possible to make some amends for the past. I came for—our child's sake."

The voice wavered curiously. Anah Hurst took in all at once. He was free from bonds. Death had released him, given him liberty to speak.

He was the lover of her youth, the father of her child. Through all these years she had never been able to cast him out utterly, though she no longer loved. He had changed too. The portly, worldly, self-conscious man was so different from the ideal she remembered.

"It is too late," she replied.

"No, no!" with sudden haste and terror. "Think what I can give him, if you will take nothing for yourself. And once, in those old days, you loved me."

"That is dead."

"Anah, Anah! do not be so pitiless. Hear my confession. I have been a madman, a weak coward, a despicable villain; but circumstances were stronger than I. You were my lawful wife then. Why did some plausable devil smoothe the way for

me? Why did all things hurry me toward this mad, miserable ending? The man who married us, a stranger in the little town, went West and died three months afterward, and this foul temptation haunted me until it took me in a giant's clasp. I did struggle, but fate was against me. There was my grandfather's will, the promise he had extorted from me, my cousin's regard—a swift current that seemed to bear me down. But if I had known—if I had known!"

She studied him like something apart from her own life. The first sin God had helped her to forgive; but this cowardly cruelty, begging for itself when it found all its other plans defeated, was too weak and contemptible.

"And you kept silence all these years?"

"What else could I do? I waited until it was too late to speak, and then I bore my burden with outward composure. I was a loyal husband to the one who has gone; but God cursed me in her child, in everything, I think. And now I wish to retrace my steps. Can I find no place for repentance? Is it too late for all amends? Remember that Victor is my child as well, and have a little pity."

"You had none on me then," with a sharp, passionate cry. "You left us to perish, or to live disgraced. If he were vile and miserable, if we had both gone down to the place where you thrust us, would you be willing to help raise him? This is a man's tardy justice and repentance."

Her eyes flashed as she spoke, and a fine indignation veiled in scarlet suffused her face.

"No, I throw myself upon your mercy. I ask for a little right in my son, for the privilege of restoring him to his own station. The world need never know our secret. When the proper time comes I can take you home honorably, if you will, and your son shall be master at Rothermel. It is no mean heritage."

"My answer is, that I would rather be a menial in my kinswoman's household than mistress of yours. If you think

that empty honor can compensate for my bitter pangs, you read me poorly indeed."

"Empty honor? Anah, I was weakly fascinated by a woman whose charms were manifold, but your name only has been engraven on my heart. God knows that it has been hard work to keep from loving you while I had no right."

Yes, love was utterly dead, killed by falsehood, treachery, and selfishness.

"My son shall choose for himself," she said, quietly, ignoring his appeal. Then she walked across the hall to the room she had so lately left, the open paper still in her hand. Mrs. McRae and Victor were surprised by her stately bearing.

"There!" she exclaimed, in a strong, clear tone. "Read it, both of you. This clergyman's signature raises me in the world's estimation, clears you from all stain. If you want a father and a fortune, *he* is there waiting for you. But no wealth, no honor, no late regard can give me back the lost lover of my youth! I shall remain true and loyal to the man who saved me in my hour of need—John Hurst's widow, always. But Kirke Gilliat waits for you."

She had been proud of him many a time before, but never so proud as when she sent him in the flush of his youth and manly beauty to stamp the ineffaceable wrong home to Kirke Gilliat's soul, that in its self-complacency fancied this deep and bitter sin could be righted with dearest gain to himself.

But when Victor had gone she laid her head in Janet McRae's lap and sobbed with a woman's keen, overwhelming passion.

"I am glad to be pure and honorable in your eyes, my friend, my friend!"

"Who am I that I should judge? God forgive me for having arrogated that power to myself."

The strange day was near its ending. A soft, mellow sunset, with a golden haze dropping to purple twilight. The tragedy

and pain of their lives rounding as tranquilly, perhaps, and folding the old day of sorrow into a soft winding-sheet ere it was laid away in the tomb.

A strange time indeed for Victor Hurst. He knew now what a father's pride might be, and the awful retribution that could come to wrong-doing, even though it might go on prosperously for years. One human life was so linked in with another, that no act was without wide-spread consequences, no sin but what bore fruit to some later generation.

He was thinking now of his own life. How much work there was to do on these broad acres. Towns to build; prosperity to evolve; human lives to watch; human souls to feed. When a man has learned the grand secret of life, and comprehends its sacred duties, labor is ennobled in his eyes for all time.

There was work and duty here; love, happiness. These three women rested upon him for strength, for protection. Would any mere selfish rambling about, seeking for pleasure and honor, compensate for their solitary hours and hungering pain?

He turned and smiled. Sylvia caught it up with the last arrowy ray of sunset, and answered, slipping her child's hand within his, so strong and warm.

"You will stay?"

"Ah, you read so quickly, my darling;" pleased at her discernment.

"You can study here."

"As I told you, I may find better things than a statue—souls to assist."

Then, with his arm still around her, he drew her to Mrs. McRae.

"Will you take us both?" he asked.

"Yes. Sylvia, child, your eyes are clearer than my old ones. Be a good wife to him."

Mrs. Hurst came and kissed them both.

"There will be a double marriage, Trewartha," Mrs. McRae said, as he was going away that evening. "Let them be quiet and over with as speedily as possible. Ruth will always be my eldest daughter."

But Ruth, learning her sweet lesson, was quite ready to leave mother and home and go to her husband. It is best that it should be so.

Tramping over the hills, Victor met Paul.

"It is decided," he announced, with a joyous ring. "I shall remain here, work and study, and perhaps win a little fame. Let your wanderings end, for I need you too."

The dark little face was aglow with pleasure.

And in the long life that came to him he was no idler. The meaning of the greater work, demanded by God, grew clearer to him; the work to which we all add our mite, in honor or dishonor; in fair, bold writing, or blurred letters read only through tears.

Kirke Gilliat hears of them in his great, solitary house. Sylvia, his son's wife, but not here. Prattling children clustering around their knees, whose voices he will never listen to in these old halls.

But he knows the black shadow, hanging over his lonely years, which he calls fate, is only another name for God's watchful justice, that when it strikes, strikes surely. He chose the purple and fine linen, and he has it—a dreary mockery.

Over John Hurst's grave the flowers bloom, tended by loving hands. If he had saved but one soul it would have been well with him, but his feeble hands will not rise empty at the last day.

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